

חמש מגילות

FIVE MEGILLOTH

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PHILIP BIRNBAUM



הַמְשִׁלְוֹת

FIVE MEGILLOT



# חֵמֶשׁ מְגִילוֹת

## FIVE MEGILLOTH

מִתְּרַגְּמוֹת וּמִפְּרַשׁוֹת מִאַת  
פָּלָטִיאָל בִּירְנְבּוּם

*Translated and Annotated  
by*

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HEBREW PUBLISHING COMPANY  
NEW YORK

## FIVE MEGILLOTH

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*Printed in the United States of America*

## INTRODUCTION

### I

#### SONG OF SONGS

The five biblical books which are known as the *Five Megilloth* (Scrolls) are recited in the synagogue, as part of the liturgy, on the following special occasions: the Song of Songs on Pesah; Ruth on Shavuoth; Lamentations on Tish'ah b'Av, the fast day commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem, first by the Babylonians in 586 before the common era, and then by the Romans in the year 70. Ecclesiastes is recited on Sukkoth, and Esther on Purim. In the Hebrew Bible, the *Five Megilloth*, forming a class by themselves, are arranged according to the sequence of the aforementioned annual occasions.

In the past nineteen centuries, the allegorical method of interpretation has been applied to the Song of Songs in Jewish tradition. It has been accepted as an allegory of the relations between God and the people of Israel. Rabbi Akiva, who suffered martyrdom in the year 132, declared the Song of Solomon to be the holiest of all the sacred poetical writings.

The virtue of an allegory is that it leads the reader to think for himself, since its characters and actors are veiled representations, implied but not stated. Indeed, the Bible as a whole is believed to possess no single definitive meaning. Its very multiplicity of meanings results in its universal appeal, and marks it a continually relevant book. Some see in the Song of Songs an inspired portrayal of ideal human love, a description of the sacred married union.

According to the paraphrase of the Targum, the poem portrays the history of the Jewish people. Some interpreters took it

to be the story of the author's love for a country maiden, whom he raised to the rank of a queen. Another opinion, which has won wide acceptance among students of the Bible, contends that the Song of Songs contains a collection of love songs, suitable for marriage festivities.

The Song of Songs has been referred to as a gem of literature, a treasury of word and thought for the mystic's vocabulary. It is reckoned among the books known as the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, even though it contains no direct teaching, as in the case of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some interpreters have understood the Song of Songs as an admonition to a married couple to love each other. Several excerpts follow:

"I hear the voice of my beloved! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills! My beloved is like a gazelle, like a young deer. There he stands, behind the wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. . .

"My beloved called and said to me: Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. For, lo, the winter is over, the rain is past and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of song has come. . .

"On my bed at night I looked for him whom my soul loves. I asked the watchmen: Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Scarcely had I left them than I found him. I held him and would not let go of him until I had brought him into my mother's house. . .

"I was asleep, but my heart was awake. Hark! My beloved is knocking. . . I opened to my beloved, but he had turned away and was gone. I searched for him, but could not find him; I called him, but he did not answer. . . My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the flowerbeds of balsam, to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and he is mine. . . How beautiful you are, how pleasing, my love, my delight. . .

"Come, let us go into the fields, let us stay in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards, to see whether the grapevine has budded, whether the vine blossoms have opened, whether the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give my love to you. . .

"Love is strong as death itself; its flashes are flashes of fire, a flame of the Lord. Floods cannot quench love, rivers cannot drown it. If a man offered all his wealth for love, he would be

utterly scorned. . . Make haste, my beloved! Be like a gazelle, or like a young deer, on the mountains of spices."

**שיר השירים**, the Songs of Songs, is an exquisitely beautiful poem, replete with fascinating words and picturesque expressions. Its author carries us along with him into the vineyards, the hills, the villages. He awakes us at daybreak to catch the scent of the forest trees, to gather the apples and the pomegranates, to listen to theplash of falling waters. His verse is fragrant with the breath of spring.

## II

## RUTH

The book of Ruth is recited in the synagogue on Shavuoth, the harvest festival commemorating the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, because the scene of its story is the harvest field and, too, its leading character, Ruth, embraces Judaism.

Ruth's impassioned declaration of her true-hearted affection for Naomi, her mother-in-law, is one of the most beautiful passages in the book: "Entreat me not to leave you and to turn back from following you; wherever you go, I will go; wherever you stay, I will stay; your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God; wherever you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord punish me time and again if anything but death parts me from you!"

The book of Ruth takes its name from Ruth who clung to Naomi with all the unselfishness of true-hearted affection. The narrative is one of idyllic beauty. It is the most charming short story in the Bible. It presents a pleasing picture of life in Eretz Yisrael during the period of the Judges, about two generations before King David. Approximately two-thirds of the narrative is in dialogue. The principal characters of the story are amiable, courteous, unassuming. They all show how a religious spirit may pervade the conduct of daily life.

The contents of the book of Ruth are well known. Naomi is an example of faithfulness and loyalty, self-sacrifice and moral integrity. Widowed and bereft of her two sons, Naomi returned to

Bethlehem, Judah, from the land of Moab, where they had lived during a famine in their own country. Anxious to provide for Ruth and to see her married, she successfully arranged the marriage of Ruth to Boaz, ancestor of King David. The book is primarily concerned to trace the ancestry of David. It appears to show that the principle of divine reward for good deeds is valid for all nationalities.

Interesting is the significance of names in Naomi's family. Their derivations are as follows: Naomi, *pleasant*; Elimelech, *my God is King*; Mahlon, *sickly*; Chilion, *wasting away*; Orpah, *turning away*; Ruth, *friend*; Boaz, *fleet*.

When the three men had died in Moab, where Mahlon had married Ruth, a Moabite maiden, she left her native land and accompanied her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. While gleaning in the field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi's deceased husband, she made a good impression on him and he took a liking to her. Custom required a relative of Mahlon, Ruth's deceased husband, to marry Ruth. Boaz took her to wife after the refusal of one nearer of kin. By this marriage, Ruth became an ancestress of David. This was not a levirate marriage, since Boaz was not a brother of Ruth's deceased husband. According to custom, when the widow of a childless man desired to sell his estate, in the absence of a brother, the nearest of kin and heir to the husband was to buy or redeem it of the widow. The property was thereby retained in the family. Simultaneously, the kinsman voluntarily assumed levirate duties by marrying the widow. This was considered a mark of loyalty to the family. A son born of such union was legally the son of the deceased.

The contents of the book in outline are as follows: 1) Naomi returns to her native town, Bethlehem, with her Moabite daughter-in-law Ruth; 2) Ruth gleans in the field of Naomi's wealthy kinsman Boaz; 3) Ruth appeals to Boaz to perform the part of a kinsman-redeemer; 4) Ruth is married to Boaz and gives birth to Oved; 5) genealogy from Perez to David. The book thus supplies a family tree for the greatest of the kings of Jewish history. It contains a humanitarian plea on behalf of the childless widow, so that the next of kin would assume responsibility for her.

It has been pointed out that simplicity characterizes alike

the noblest and the loveliest poems. There are no better examples of this than the books of Ruth and Esther. There is not a phrase, an image, an accident, too much or too little in either; not a false note of atmosphere or feeling.

Excerpt: "At mealtime Boaz said to her: Come here and eat some of our food; dip your slice of bread in the vinegar. So she sat beside the harvesters, and he handed her roasted grains. . . . Boaz married Ruth, and she bore him a son. Then the women said to Naomi: Blessed be the Lord who has not left you this day without a kinsman. May the boy's name be renowned in Israel. . . ."

The book of Ruth, depicting scenes amid felicities of Jewish home life in a pastoral age, shares with the book of Jonah the distinction of expressing the most charitable attitude toward non-Jews. In Jonah, the divine mercy is portrayed as universal: God spared heathen Nineveh, including "more than 120,000 human beings, who do not know their right hand from their left, and much cattle."

## III

## LAMENTATIONS

The author of *Lamentations* is named nowhere in the book. Tradition, however, credits the writing of the book to Jeremiah, of whom it is written: "Jeremiah composed an elegy over Josiah, and the singers, both men and women, all spoke of Josiah in their lamentations, as indeed they do to this day, for they made it a regular custom in Israel; they are written in the [book of] lamentations." (וְקָרְנוּ רְמִיהוּ עַל יְאָשִׁיחּוּ, וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֹּל הַשְׁרִים וְהַשְׁרוֹתִים) ( Jeremiah 35:12). Josephus has transmitted this tradition, stating: "But all the people mourned greatly for him. . . . and Jeremiah the prophet composed an elegy to lament him, which is extant till this time" (Antiquities 10:5,1).

This tradition is found in the Talmud (Baba Bathra 15a) as well as in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek version of the Bible, which begins the book as follows: "After Israel was carried into captivity, and Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremias sat down and

wept, and sang this song of woe over Jerusalem. . ." Jeremiah lamented for Josiah, but this has no connection with the book of Lamentations.

The theme of the five elegies, or lamentation, is the capture and destruction of Jerusalem, with dreadful sufferings to its defenders. In various places the Jewish state is personified, bemoaning its hard fate; or else, the author who is believed to be Jeremiah, speaks in the first person as representing the Jewish nation.

Chanted in the synagogue on Tish'ah b'Av, the ninth of Av, which commemorates the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple, the five anonymous poems are for the most part alphabetic acrostics, that is, the first four elegies. The fifth poem consists of twenty-two verses, corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The purpose of an acrostic is to aid memorization. This carefully wrought, artificial style seems to have a further purpose, that of conveying completeness of grief, confession of sin, and perennial hopefulness.

The first lament depicts Zion as a onetime populous city now standing in solitude, as a poor widow. Her former friends and allies have become her enemies. Pilgrims no longer travel the roads leading to Jerusalem. The second lament depicts Zion's sorrow due to God's anger. The poet sheds tears at the sight of famished children in the city squares.

The third lament begins with the verse, "I am the man who has seen affliction," expressing a yearning for hope: "The Lord is good to those who trust in him. . . It is good to wait in silence for the Lord's help. . . The Lord does not reject forever. Even though he causes grief, he has mercy in his abundant kindness" (3:25-33).

The fourth lament contains a description of the besiegers, tightening their stranglehold, and a denunciation of Edom, who shall indeed drink of the cup of divine wrath. Zion has already received punishment for her sins. Edom's turn shall be next.

The fifth and concluding poem contains Zion's prayer for mercy: "Our pursuers were swifter than the vultures of the air; they hunted us on the hills, they lay in wait for us in the wilderness. Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; look and see our disgrace! Our heritage has been turned over to strangers; we have

become orphans and are fatherless. . . Slaves rule over us; there is none to free us from their power. . . Restore us, O Lord, and let us return to thee. Renew our days as of old."

## IV

## ECCLESIASTES

It has been said that there is nothing grander than the book of Ecclesiastes in its impassioned survey of mortal pain and pleasure, its estimate of failure and success; none of more noble sadness; no poem working more indomitably for spiritual illumination. As one of the Five Megilloth (scrolls) belonging to the third division of the Hebrew Bible, known as *Kethuvim*, *Koheleth* (Ecclesiastes) is recited in the synagogue on the eighth day of the *Sukkoth* festival.

Koheleth counsels patience, endurance and discretion, and gives expression to the theory that history and nature move in a circle, an ever-revolving and recurring circle. A sense of futility and pessimism is displayed throughout the book, which deals with the pursuit of wisdom, pleasure, wealth, and evildoing. Upon examining the value of wisdom, wealth and pleasure, Koheleth finds life unsatisfying. He declares that wealth does not yield happiness, since it is often lost before it is enjoyed. At death, it is left to people who have not toiled to acquire it.

How are we to gain happiness? Shall we follow wisdom or unrestrained pleasure? Human existence is monotonous. There is nothing new in the entire world. We should therefore alternate wholesome work with reasonable pleasures of life while we can, since there is no telling when the end comes.

Here are a few maxims excerpted from Koheleth: "A lover of money will never be satisfied with his money. Sweet is the sleep of the worker, whether he eats much or little. But the surfeit of the rich man does not let him sleep. Naked he came from his mother's womb, and naked he must return; for all his toil, he has nothing to take with him. A good name is better than precious perfume.

"Let your garments be always spotless. Cast your bread upon the waters; after many days you shall find it. Sweet is the light of life; it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. Rejoice in your youth, young man. Remove all worries from your mind, and keep your body free from pain. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. . . ."

In chapter one, Koheleth asserts that the course of nature does not change. Nothing is new, the present is like the past. This eternal sameness continues to be the quality of human existence. The wisdom man possesses does not alter his condition; it only deepens his sorrow by being aware of life's uselessness. In chapter two, Koheleth recalls his experiments with a variety of pleasures and joyous living. He has tasted all that could be regarded as good, denying himself nothing, and has come to the conclusion that there is no permanent value in all this. There is much to be said in praise of wisdom, but in the end the wise man dies, just as the fool does. Indeed, he does not gain more out of life than the fool does.

In chapter three, Koheleth mentions a variety of opposites in human existence: life and death, weeping and laughing, doing and not doing, there being a season for everything. God's plan seems to test men, who have no advantage over the beast. Both have the same fate: death and the return to dust. In chapter four, Koheleth speaks of oppression and the miseries of the oppressed. More fortunate are those who have not been born than those who have experienced the world's woes. Though it is foolish to abstain from work, successful toil produces envy among neighbors.

Chapter five: Be humble and listen. Do not talk much. Do not be surprised at corruption among officials, since all officials are encouraged by the example of those above them to make what gain they can from their vocations. Chapter six: At times, God bestows his gifts on a man who has not the power to enjoy them. Chapter seven: The spirit of levity becomes fools. The wise man feels himself more at home in the house of mourning than in the house of mirth. Like money, learning has a protective value. The wise man will avoid all extremes in conduct. . . . Chapter 11: Take life as it is, grasping its opportunities, being neither too

fearful nor hesitant when decisions have to be made. Chapter 12: In your youth, while your vitality is yet unimpaired by the infirmities of age, remember your Creator.

## V

## ESTHER

The book of Esther, one of the most cherished works in Jewish literature, is the last of the Five Megilloth that form part of the third division of the Bible, known as **כְּתֻבִים** (Sacred Writings). *Megillath Esther* has come to be known as the *Megillah*, a designation indicative of the great importance assigned to it by the Jewish people. It tells the story of a Jewish girl who used her influence as queen of Persia to save her people from a general massacre which Haman had plotted against them. It is a tale of plot and counterplot, showing the downfall of the arrogant and the vindication of the innocent. Haman's plot was frustrated, and the tables were completely turned. Out of these happenings the Feast of Purim came into being. The name of the feast, *Purim*, is a non-Hebrew word meaning *lot*, because they cast *pur* in the presence of Haman to fix the exact date of the extermination, but the Jews escaped, successfully resisting their persecutors on that date (Adar 13). Purim is observed on Adar 14, and the following day (*Shushan Purim*) is observed as Purim in cities which have been walled since the time of Joshua (Jerusalem, for example).

The divine name is not mentioned in the book of Esther; nor does it contain reference to any book of the Bible; nor does it allude to Jerusalem or to the Temple. Nevertheless it is one of the most cherished of our sacred writings. In times of oppression, our people have found comfort in this narrative, strengthening their hope of being liberated in days of distress. Its character sketches and implied teachings provide an element of moral instruction. Haman's fate is a reminder of the idea that pride precedes a fall. Esther is described as dutiful to her guardian Mordecai and loyal unto death to her people. While the divine name is omitted from the book, the implication is clearly conveyed that Mordecai and Esther were used by God as instruments

for the deliverance of his people. A special talmudic tractate was written on the relevant regulations of the obligatory reading of the *Megillah* on Purim, both in the evening and the morning services.

After a literary analysis, Bible scholars have come to the conclusion that the author of the book of Esther was one of the skillful literary artists of his time, and that the narrative deserves to be reckoned among the masterpieces of literature. The story moves along smoothly, keeping the reader in suspense, until the denouement is reached in a powerfully dramatic moment in Esther's second banquet (chapter seven). The author knows how to make actions speak more effectively than words. The portrait of the character is formed in the mind of the reader by concrete action.

The characters are types rather than unique individuals. The king is the typical impulsive despot; Haman is the typical enemy of the Jewish people, drunk with pride and power; Esther is the beautiful woman who knows how to use her charms advantageously; Mordecai is the Jewish leader who knows how to seize the opportune moment. There is no finer example of irony than the account of Haman's humiliation and fall; he falls into his own trap and is reduced to a position of begging for his life at the queen's feet.

*Megillath Antiochus*, the Scroll of Antiochus, known also as מגילת החשמונאים, the Scroll of the Hasmoneans, has come down to us in both Aramaic and Hebrew. The Hebrew version is a literal translation from the Aramaic original, which was composed probably in the seventh century. During the Middle Ages, this *Megillah* was read in the Italian synagogues on *Hanukkah* as the book of Esther, the *Megillah par excellence*, is read on *Purim*. It still forms part of the liturgy of the Yemenite Jews. Rav Saadyah Gaon attributed its authorship to the five sons of Mattathias. The following is an English translation of this *Megillah*, abridged.

PHILIP BIRNBAUM

חמש מגילות

FIVE MEGILLOT

## שיר השירים

א

שיר השירים אשור לשלמה: ישכלני מונשיקות פדו קיד  
טוביים לדיד מין: לבי שמניך טובים שמן תורך שמק  
עלון עלמות אהבך: משכני אתני גראה גבאי  
כמלך חזרז נילה ונשמחה לך נובידה לדיד מין  
מיישרים אהבך: שהורה אני ונאה בנות ירושלים  
באיה לי קדר כירעות שלמה: אלתרני שען שהודית  
שלשופתני לשמש בני אמי נחרבי שמי נטהה ארדי  
לברמים ברמי של לי לא נטראתי: הגודה לי שאהבה  
גפשי איכה תרזה איכה פרביין באחרים שלמה אריה  
בעיטה על עדרי חבירך: אם לא תדע לך ריפה בנים  
יארך בעליך הצאן ורعي אהנידך על משכונות  
הרים: לסתותי ברכבי פרעה דמייך רעה: נאו

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Shir Hashirim is recited every Friday evening because of the religious idealism attached to it by tradition. The poem has been accepted throughout the ages as an allegory of the relations between God and his people. Some nineteen centuries ago, Rabbi Akiba declared: "All the *Kethuvim* are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holiest of all." According to the paraphrase of the Targum, the poem portrays the history of Israel till the times of the Messiah. It has

# THE SONG OF SONGS

## I

### The Song of Songs by Solomon.

O that he would kiss me with his lips! Indeed, your caresses are better than wine. Sweet is the fragrance of your perfumes; your very self is a precious perfume; therefore do the maidens love you. Take me with you; let us hasten! The king brings me into his chambers. We will thrill with delight over you; we will celebrate your caresses more than wine! Rightly do they love you.

I am dark yet comely, maidens of Jerusalem: dark as the tents of Kedar, comely as the curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, for the sun has tanned me; my mother's sons were angry with me, they made me keeper of the vineyards; I did not look after my own vineyard.

Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you feed the flocks, where you make them rest at noon; why should I wander among the flocks of your companions?

If you do not know, fairest of women, follow the sheep-tracks, and pasture your kids beside the tents of the shepherds. I compare you, my love, to a mare in Pharaoh's chariots. Beautiful are your

---

been regarded also as a representation of the affection of Israel for the Sabbath. The author of the poem, **לכָה דָוִדִי**, "one of the finest pieces of religious poetry in existence," used the theme of the Sabbath bride and borrowed the title of his famous hymn from the Song of Songs (7:12). Although its meaning has been extended by various methods of interpretation, one cannot miss the beauty of the poem in its literal interpretation. Its author takes us along with him into the open air, to the vineyards, the villages, the mountains. He awakens us at daybreak to catch the scent of the forest trees, to gather the apples and the pomegranates. His verse is fragrant with the breath of spring

**קָדוֹר** a tribe of nomads who wandered in the Arabian desert.

**כַּרְמִי שָׁלִי** that is, my personal beauty. The phrase is often used in the sense of neglecting one's family while being engrossed in public duties.

**לְסֻתָּתִי** The point of comparison is the rich ornamentation of the bride.

לְהַלֵּל בְּתוֹרִים צִוָּהָךְ בְּתוֹרִים: תּוֹרִי זָהָב נְעִשָּׂה־לְךָ  
אָם נְקָדָתָךְ נְבָסָת: עַד־שָׁהַמֵּלֵךְ בְּמִסְבּוֹ נְרָהָי נְתַנְּנָה רִיחָוּ  
צָהָרָה דָמָר וְדוֹדָי לְיַי בֵּין שְׂרֵי יְלֵין: אַשְׁכָּל הַלְּפָר וְדוֹדָי  
לְיַי בְּכָרְמֵי עַיְן נְדָי: דָגָךְ יְפָה רַעֲתָי דָגָךְ יְפָה עַיְינֵךְ יְעָנָם:  
לְגַנְקָךְ יְפָה דָוָדָי אָפְנָעָם אָפְעָרָשָׂנוּ רַעֲנָנָה: לְגַרְוָת בְּתַלְיָנָה  
אָנָּזָם רְחַיְמָנוּ בְּרוֹתָם:

## ב

אֲנִי חַבְצָלָת הַשָּׁלֹן שְׁוֹשָׁנָת הַעֲמָקִים: בְּשַׁוְשָׁנָה בְּן  
הַחַדִּים בְּן רַעֲתָי בְּן דְּבָנוֹת: בְּתַפְוֹל בְּעֵזִי הַלְּעָר בְּן  
דָּעֵךְ בְּן הַבָּנִים בְּצָלָה חַמְדָתִי וַיְשָׁבָתִי וּפְרָנִי מְתוֹק לְחָכִי:  
גַּבְיָאָנוּ אַלְכִּית הַיּוֹן וְגַנְלָוּ עַלְיָאָהָבָה: סְמָבָנִי בְּאַשְׁשָׁוֹת  
לְפָרוֹנִי בְּפַפְוִתִּים בְּרִיזָוֹת אָהָבָה אָנוּ: שְׁמָאָלָן פָּתָת  
לְרָאָשִׁי וִימְנָנוּ תְּחַבְּקָנִי: הַשְּׁבָעָתִי אַתְּכָם בְּנָתָה וְרִישָׁלָם  
בְּצָבָאות אוֹ בְּאַילָות הַשְּׁרָה אַמְתָעִירָה וְאַמְתָעִירָה  
אַתְּדָאָהָבָה עַד שְׁתַחְפֵץ: קוֹל יְהָוָה הַגְּדוֹלָה בָּא מְדָלָל  
עַל־הַתְּהָרִים מְלֵפָץ עַל־גְּבֻעֹות: דּוֹמָה דָוָדָי לְצָבָאי אוֹ  
לְעַפְרָהָאָלָם הַגְּדוֹלָה עַוְמָל אַתְּחָר בְּתַלְנוּ מְשֻׁבָּתָה בְּן  
קְרִי רְהִיטָה. קְרִי: לְהָ. קְרִי: וּפְרָאָד

Following are a number of expressions occurring in the Song of Songs, which are of special stylistic interest. They are here presented in the lower margins of the Hebrew pages.

רְהִיטָה our rafters, panelled ceilings. The cedar trees and fir trees form the roof over their heads as they sit in the green grass.

חַבְצָלָת הַשָּׁרָה She modestly compares herself to the wild flowers of Sharon. אַיִלָות צָבָאות are symbolic of shyness and timidity as well as of beauty.

עַד שְׁתַחְפֵץ that is, it should be allowed to awake of itself. A true love is spontaneous.

cheeks with circlets, your neck with strings of beads! Circlets of gold will we make for you, with studs of silver.

While the king sits at his table, my nard gives forth its fragrance. My beloved is my bunch of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is my cluster of henna-blossom from the gardens of Engedi.

You are beautiful, my love, you are beautiful; your eyes are dove-like.

You are handsome, my beloved, and pleasant; and our couch is leafy. The beams of our houses are cedars, and our rafters are firs.

## II

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Like a lily among thorns, so is my loved one among the maidens.

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the youths; in his shadow I long to sit, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He brings me to the house of wine, and looks at me with love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am love-sick. O that his left hand were under my head, and his right hand were embracing me! I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the deer of the field, do not stir up, do not rouse love, until it please.

The voice of my beloved! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills! My beloved is like a gazelle, like a young deer; here he stands, behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

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Originally, there were several midrashic works commenting on the *Song of Songs*. One of them referred the poem to the revelation at Mount Sinai, another to the exodus from Egypt, and a third to the Temple or the *Mishkan*, the portable sanctuary used in the wilderness. These midrashim were afterward combined into one work, the present *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah*, which must have been composed about the end of the eighth century. Unlike *Shir ha-Shirim Zuta*, a smaller midrash containing numerous legends, which was composed not later than the middle of the tenth century, *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* does not consist of many *aggadot*.

Eretz Yisrael in springtime is graphically described in the *Song of Songs*: the land is beautifully green, and carpeted with flowers. The air is fresh and

החלנות מציון מזחדרקים: ענה דודי ואמר ל' קומי  
 לך רעתי יפתח ולכידך: קידעה הפטחו עבר הנשט  
 חלף לך לו: הנינים נראו באין עת חומר הגיע וקול  
 הדור נשמע בארכנו: התחנה חנטה פניה ורגננים  
 סמוך נתנו רית קומי לך רעתי יפתח ולכידך: יונת  
 בהנין הפלע בטל המרינה הראיין את-מראל  
 השמעו אתקילד כי-קילד ערב ומראל נאה: אחוד  
 לנו שעליים שעליים קטעים מהבלים קרמים וכרמיין  
 סמוך: דודי ל' ואני לו הרעיה בשושנים: עד שיפוח  
 הום ונסוי הצללים סב' דמה-ילך דודי לאבי או לעפר  
**האלים על-תני בתר:**

## ג

על-משכבי בלילהות בקשתי את שארכה נפשי בקשתי  
 ולא מזאתו: אקומה נא ואסכה בער בשוקים  
 וברחבות אבלשה את שארכה נפשי בקשתי ולא  
 מזאתו: מזאיי השמורים דסקבים בער את  
**שארה נפשי ראיים: במעט שעברת מלהם עד**

קרני תפוחי

laden with sweet scents. The sky is blue, the mountains and plains look beautiful, and the sun is gentle. All these seem combined to make one glad to be alive. The henna-blossom (אשכל הכתר) has fragrant flowers, growing in clusters like grapes. It is presently found in Kibbutz En-Gedi, the most delightful spot on the western shore of the Dead Sea, an oasis of luxurious vegetation.

The powders of the merchant (אבקת רוכל) are powdered perfumes. King Solomon's palanquin (אפרין) made of costly cedar and cyprus of Lebanon, is described as having had silver pillars supporting the canopy, arms of gold, and a seat covered with a costly purple fabric.

My beloved called and said to me: "Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. For, lo, the winter is over, the rain is past and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of song has come; and the call of the turtle-dove is heard in our land; the fig-tree is ripening its early figs, and the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance. Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. O my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your form, let me hear your voice; for sweet is your voice, and your form is comely."

Seize us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom.

My beloved is mine, and I am his; he feeds his flock among the lilies. When the day grows cool, and the shadows flee, return, my beloved, and be like a gazelle, or like a young deer, on the mountains of Bether.

### III

On my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but I did not find him. "I will rise [I said] and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares—I will seek him whom my soul loves." I sought him, but I did not find him. The watchmen who go about the city found me: "Have you seen him whom my soul loves?" Scarcely had I left them, when I found him

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תוֹת רַצְקָה (רַצְקָה) may allude to highly prized ebony (חַבּוֹנָה), mentioned in Ezekiel 27:16, since the Hebrew words **חַבּוֹנָה** and **אַהֲבָה** are very similar. Accordingly, the original meaning of the phrase in question would be: inlaid with ebony from the maidens of Jerusalem.

אַחֲרָה לְנוּ שָׁעַלְמָה is a couplet of a vineyard song which she sings in response to his request to let him hear her voice.

וְנָסַע הַצְלָלִים the shadows of rocks and trees disappear when the sun sets.

... עַל מַשְׁכֵבִי is a dream she narrates to her friends.

צְמַרְתִּי עַשְׁן the pillars of smoke are caused by the burning of incense.

... שְׁעַרְךָ The bride's dark hair, hanging down in tresses over her shoulders, is compared to a herd of black goats couching on the slopes of the hill.

מְתַאֲמִים symmetrical, running accurately in pairs, the upper teeth corresponding to the lower.

שְׁמַצְאָתִי אֶת שְׁאַרְבָּה נְפָשִׁי אֶחָזָתוֹ וְלֹא אֶרְפֶּנוּ עַד  
שְׁהַבְּיָאָתוֹ אֶל־בֵּית אַמְּנוּ וְאֶל־תְּדָרְהָ הַרְחָתִי: הַשְּׁבָעָתִי  
אֲתֶכְם בְּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם בָּצְבָאות אָוְ בְּאִילוֹת הַשְּׁדָה אַמְּנִ  
תְּעוּרוֹ וְאַמְּתַעֲזָרוֹ אֶת־דָּאַרְבָּה עַד־שְׁתַחְפֵּץ: מַיְ וְאֶת  
עַלְהָ מִזְדְּמָרֶבֶר בְּתִימָרוֹת עַשְׁן מְלָכָתָרָת מֶרֶל וְלִבְנָה מִפְּלָלָ  
אַבְכָתָ רַזְכָל: הַנָּה מְטוּחָ שְׁלַלְמָה שָׁשִׁים גְּבָרִים סְכִיב  
לְהָ מְגָבֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל: בְּלָם אַתְּחֵי חַרְבָּ מְלָמֵדָי מְלָחָמָה  
אִישׁ חַרְבָּ עַל־רַבְּלָי מִפְּחָד בְּלִילָות: אַפְּרִיזָן עַשְׂהָ לְזָ  
הַמְּלָךְ שְׁלָמָה מַעַצְיָ הַלְּבָנָן: עַמְּדוּ עַשְׂהָ כְּסִיף רַפְּדָתָ  
וְחַרְבָּ מְרַכְבָּו אַרְגָּמָן תָּוטָ רַצְוֹת אַהֲבָה מְבָנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָם:  
צָאַנְהָ וְרַאַנְהָ בְּנוֹת צִיּוֹן בְּמַלְךְ שְׁלָמָה בְּעַטְרָה שְׁעַטְרָדָ  
לְ אַמְּנוּ בְּנָם תְּתִנְתָּהוּ וּבְנָם שְׁמַתָּה לְבָוָ:

## ד

דָּנָךְ יְפָה רְעִיטָהוּ דָּנָךְ יְפָה עַינְךְ יְזָנִים מִפְּעָד לְצִמְחָדָ  
שְׁעַרְךְ בְּעַרְךְ הַעֲלִים שְׁגָלְשָׁו מְהֻרְגָּלָד: שְׁנָאָךְ בְּעַרְךְ  
הַקְּצִבּוֹת שְׁעַלְוָ מִקְּדָרְחָצָה שְׁבָלָם מִתְּאִימָות וְשְׁבָלָה:  
אַיִן בְּהָם: בְּחַזְמָתְהָשְׁנִי שְׁפָתָהָמָךְ וּמְדָבָךְ נָאָה כְּפָלָח  
הַרְמָנוּ רַקְלָךְ מִפְּעָד לְצִמְחָד: כְּמַנְגָּלְהָדָ צְוָאָךְ בְּנָי  
לְתַלְפִּיאָת אַלְפָ דָּמָנוּ תְּלָיְ עַלְיוּ כָּל שְׁלָמָן הַגְּבָרִים:

like the rounded form and ruddy color of a pomegranate.

is an allusion to the bride's necklace. On shields used as ornaments on the outside of towers, see Ezekiel 27:10-11.

is a warning to flee from Lebanon being full of dangers.

depart; compare תְּשֻׂרֵי מ (Isaiah 57:9) "you journeyed."

is used here in the sense of "my own."

honey that drips from the honeycomb. The reference is to loving words.

whom my soul loves. I held him and would not let him go, until I brought him into my mother's house, into the chamber of her who conceived me.

I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, or by the deer of the field, do not stir up, do not rouse love, until it please.

What is this coming up from the wilderness, like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all aromatic powders of the merchant? It is Solomon's palanquin; sixty heroes are around it, heroes of Israel. All of them are armed with swords, and are trained in war; each has his sword on his hip, because of danger at night. King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon. He made its columns of silver, its top of gold, its seat of purple, its interior inlaid with love, from the maidens of Jerusalem. Go forth, maidens of Zion, and gaze upon King Solomon, wearing a crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his marriage, on the day of his profound joy.

#### IV

You are beautiful, my love, you are beautiful! Your eyes are dove-like behind your veil; your hair is like a flock of goats, trailing down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep all shaped alike, which have come up from the washing; all of them are paired, and not one of them is missing. Your lips are like a thread of scarlet, and your mouth is comely; your temples, behind your veil, are like a slice of pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David built for trophies; a thousand shields hang on it,

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The Song of Songs, meaning the finest of Solomon's songs, is reckoned among the books known as the wisdom literature of the Bible, even though it contains no direct teaching as in the case of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some have understood the Song of Songs as an admonition to a married couple to love each other.

The following excerpts from the Song of Songs are most characteristic. They are presented in the lower margin of the English text:

I hear the voice of my beloved! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills! My beloved is like a gazelle, like a young deer. There he stands, behind the wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice.

שְׁנִי שְׁנִיךְ בְּשְׁנִי עֲפָרִים חָזְקִיָּה הָרָעִים בְּשָׁוֹשִׁים:  
 עַד שִׁיפּוֹת הַיּוֹם וְנַסְתּוֹ הַצְּלָלִים אַלְךְ לֵי אַלְתָּר הַמּוֹר  
 וְאַלְגְּבָעָתְּ הַלְּבָנָה: בְּלֹךְ יְפָה רַיְעָתִי וּמָם אַזְּנָה: אַתִּי  
 מַלְכָנוֹן כָּלָה אַתִּי מַלְכָנוֹן תְּבָוָא תְּשֻׁוָרִי | מַרְאָשׁ אַמְנָה  
 מַרְאָשׁ שְׁגִיל וְחַרְמָן מִמְעֻנוֹת אֲרוֹת מְלָרָה נְמִרִים:  
 לְכַבְּחָנִי אַחֲתִי כָּלָה לְכַבְּחָנִי בְּאַחַת מְעִינִךְ בְּאַחַד עַנְקָ  
 מְצִירָנִיךְ: מְהִיאָפוּ דְּרָנִיךְ אַחֲתִי כָּלָה מְהִיאָפוּ דְּרָנִיךְ מִין  
 וּרִיחַ שְׁמַעַנְךְ מַכְלֵבְשָׁמִים: נְפָתְּ הַטְּפָנָה שְׁפָתוֹתָךְ כָּלָה  
 דְּבָשׁ וְחַלְבָן תְּחַת לְשׁוֹנָךְ וּרִיחַ שְׁלָמָתָךְ בְּרִית לְבָנָךְ:  
 גָּנוֹן | גָּנוֹל אַחֲתִי כָּלָה גָּל | גָּנוֹל מְעָנוֹן חֲתִים: שְׁלָמָתָךְ  
 פְּרָדִים רְמוֹנִים עִם פְּרִי מְנִדִּים בְּפָרִים עַמְנָדִים: גְּנִידָן  
 וְכַרְבָּתָם קָנָה וְקָגָמוֹן עִם קָלָעָצִי לְבָנָה מָר וְאַדְלָוָת עִם  
 פְּלָרְאָשִׁי בְּשָׁמִים: מְעַנְןָן גָּנוֹם בְּאֶרְם מִים חַיִם וּוּלִים  
 מַרְלָבָנוֹן: עֹוְרִי צְפָן וּבְקָאִי תִּמְןָן הַפְּתִיחָן גַּעַן יְלָנוֹ בְּשָׁמָנוֹ  
 יְבָא דָרָן לְגַעַן וַיָּאֶלְעַל פְּרִי מְנִדִּיו:

## ה

בְּאַתִּי לְגַעַן אַחֲתִי כָּלָה אֲרִיתִי מַוְלָן עַמְבָשָׁמִי אַכְלָתִי  
 יְעַרְיָן עַמְדָבָשִׁי שְׁתִיתִי יְיַעַן עַמְתְּלָגִי אַכְלָוּ רְעִים שְׁתוֹ  
 לְשָׁכְרָוּ דְּקִים: אַנְיִי יְשָׁנָה וְלַכְיִי עַד קָוָלָן הוֹדִי דּוֹפָק

זה חעירו ומה תעררו חימן, צטן The north wind clears the air in Palestine; the south wind warms, and ripens. The east and west winds are stormy.

פה חעירו ומה תעררו מה is here used in the sense of "not." Compare below (I Kings 12:16). Ach the ahava

... his fingers are delicately rounded, and his nails are as transparent as topaz. ספְרִים the bright blue veins showing through the lighter skin.

חרצת ("delight") was an ancient city famed for its attractiveness. It is mentioned in Joshua 12:24; I Kings 14:17.

all armor of heroes. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, pasturing among the lilies. When the day grows cool, and the shadows flee, I will betake myself to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no blemish in you.

Come with me from Lebanon, bride of mine, with me from Lebanon come; depart from the top of Amana, from the peaks of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; you have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one bead of your necklace. How lovely are your caresses, my sister, my bride! How much better than wine are your caresses, and the fragrance of your ointments than all kinds of perfume! Your lips, my bride, drip honey; honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon. A garden inclosed is my sister, my bride, a spring inclosed, a fountain sealed. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with precious fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, together with all the finest perfumes. You are a fountain of gardens, a well of fresh water, and flowing streams from Lebanon.

Awake, northwind, and come, southwind! Blow upon my garden, that its perfume may waft out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat its precious fruits.

## V

I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh and my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat, friends; drink, drink abundantly beloved friends!

I was asleep, but my heart was awake; hark, my beloved is

---

My beloved called and said to me: Rise, my love, my beauty, come away. For, lo, the winter is over, the rain is past and gone; the flowers appear on the earth, the time of songs has come!

בְּתַחְרֵלִי אֲחֹתִי רְעֵתִי יְנִיחִי תְּמֹתִי שְׁדָאֵשִׁי נְמַלְאִתָּל  
 קְצֹוֹתִי רְסִיסִי לְלִילָה: פְּשִׁטְטוֹתִי אֲתִיכְתָּנָתִי אַיְכָה אַלְכְּשָׁנָה  
 רְחַצְתִּי אֲתִינְגָּלִי אַיְכָה אַטְנָפָסָמָה: דּוֹרִי שְׁלָחִי יְדוֹ מְדָר  
 הַחוֹר וְמַעַי הַמּוֹעֵלִי: כְּמַתִּי אֲנִי לְפִתְחָה לְדוֹרִי וּבְדִי  
 גַּטְפְּרָמָר וְאַצְבָּעָתִי מָוֶר עַבְרָעֶל בְּפִוּת הַמְּנָעוּלָה: פְּתַחְתִּי  
 אֲנִי לְדוֹרִי וְדוֹרִי חַמְקִי עַבְרָרֶנֶשֶׁי יָצָא בְּרַבְרָוּ בְּקַשְׁתִּיהוּ  
 וְלֹא מְצַאַתְּדָה קְרָאָתוֹ וְלֹא עָנָנוֹ: מְצַאַנִּי רְשַׁמְלָרִים  
 הַסְּבָבִים בְּעִיר הַכּוֹנִי פְּצַעֲנוֹ נְשָׂא אֲתִידְרִילִי מְעַלְיָה  
 שְׁמָרִי הַחֲמֹות: הַשְּׁבָעָתוֹ אַתְּכָם בְּנָתָ יְרוּשָׁלָם אָמָר  
 תִּמְצָאוּ אֲתִידְרִילִי מְהַתְּגָנוֹדוֹ לֹו שְׁחוֹלָת אַהֲבָתָאָנִי: מְהָדָה  
 דּוֹדָךְ מְלֹודָה הַיְפָה בְּנָשִׁים מְהַדְּזָהָךְ מְלֹודָה שְׁבָכָה  
 הַשְּׁבָעָתָנוֹ: דּוֹדָי צָה וְאַחֲרָם דָּבֵל מְרַבָּהָה: רָאָשׁוֹ פְּתָם  
 פְּוֹ קְצֹוֹתִוּ פְּלַטְלָלִים שְׁחָרוֹת בְּעֹרֶב: עַיְנוֹ בְּוּנִים עַלְלָה  
 אָפִיקָן מַיִם רְחַצְתָּו בְּחַלְבָּב יְשָׁבּוֹת עַלְמָלָאתָה: לְהַזּוּ  
 בְּעִירָוּת הַבָּשָׂם מְגַדְלָות מְרַקְדָּהָם שְׁפָתָחוֹנוֹ שְׁוֹשָׁגִים  
 גַּטְפּוֹת מָוֶר עַבְרָה: יְדוֹ גְּלִילִי וְהַבָּמְמָלָאִים בְּתִרְשִׁישָׁ  
 מְצִיוּן אַשְׁתָּה שְׁלָן מְלָאָפָת סְפִירִים: שְׁוֹקוֹן עַמְדוֹי שְׁשָׁ  
 מִסְפָּדִים עַלְאַדְגָּרְפָּו מְרָאוֹת בְּלַבְנָן בְּחֹר בְּאַרְזִים:  
 חַבּוֹ מִמְּפָקִים וּבְלֹן מִתְמַדִּים וְהַ דּוֹדָי וְהַ רָּעָבָנָה  
 יְרוּשָׁלָם:

תְּחִוּ בְּשֻׁלָּמִת are the words of the Shulammite, who asks why they would stare at her as at a public spectacle.

בְּטָנָן "your body," like בְּטָנִי ("my soul and my body") in Psalm 31:10.  
 צְוָאָרָךְ white, straight and slender.

בְּרַכּוֹת בְּחַסְבָּנוֹ refers to the soft shimmer of her eyes.

אַפְקָן כְּמַדְלָל הַלְּבָנוֹן straight and symmetrical. The tower of Lebanon was probably some watch-tower in the direction of Damascus.

knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my innocent one; for my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the drops of the night." But I have taken off my robe; how shall I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how shall I soil them? My beloved put his hand through the doorway, and my heart yearned for him. I rose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with the finest myrrh, upon the handles of the bar. I opened for my beloved; but my beloved had turned away, had gone; my soul failed when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he did not answer me. The watchmen who go about the city found me; they struck me, they wounded me; the guardians of the walls stripped me of my mantle. I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, do not tell him that I am love-sick.

What is your beloved more than another lover, O fairest of women? What is your beloved more than another lover, that you adjure us thus?

Dazzling and ruddy is my beloved, distinguished among ten thousand. His head is fine gold, his locks are curled, and as black as a raven. His eyes are like doves beside the water-brooks, bathing in milk, and fitly set. His cheeks are beds of balsam-flower, producing sweet perfumes; his lips are [red] lilies, breathing the finest myrrh. His hands are rods of gold, studded with topaz pink; his body is polished ivory, inlaid with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble, set on bases of fine gold; his form is like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether lovely. Such is my beloved, and such is my lover, O maidens of Jerusalem.

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On my bed at night I looked for him whom my soul loves. I asked the watchmen: Have you seen him whom my soul loves? Scarcely had I left them where I found him. I held him and would not let go of him until I had brought him into my mother's house.

I was asleep, but my heart was awake. Hark! My beloved is knocking. I open for my beloved, but he had turned away and was gone. I searched for him, but could not find him; I called him, but he did not answer.

ו

אהה דָּלֶךְ דָּלֶךְ תִּפְהָ בְּנָשִׁים אֲנָה פָּנָה דָּלֶךְ וְנַבְקָשָׁעַ  
 עַמְקָה: דָּלֶךְ יָנָדֶל לְנָעַ לְעַרְוָנָה תְּבָשָׁם לְרַעֲוָת בְּנָיִם  
 וְלַלְקָט שְׁוֹשָׁנִים: אֲנָה לְדָלֶךְ דָּלֶךְ לְיִ הַרְוָעָה בְּשְׁוֹשָׁנִים:  
 יִפְהָ אַתְּ רַעֲעָתִ בְּחַרְצָה נָאָה כִּירּוֹשָׁלָם אִימָה בְּנָדְגָלָות:  
 דָּסְבִּי עַזְּנִידִ מְנַנְּדִי שְׁהָם הַרְדִּיבָנִי שְׁעַרְךָ בְּעַדְךָ הַעֲלָם  
 שְׁגָלָשִׁי מְנַדְּגָלִידִ: שְׁעַדְךָ בְּעַדְךָ הַרְתָּלִים שְׁעַלְךָ מְלָךְ  
 הַרְחַצָּה שְׁפָלָם מְתָאִימָה וְשְׁבָלָה אַזְנָן בְּדָם: בְּפֶלֶח  
 הַרְמָנוֹן רַקְתָּךְ מְבָעֵד לְצָמָחָךְ: שְׁשִׁים הַמָּהָמָלְכָות וְשְׁמָנִים  
 פְּלִינְשִׁים וְעַלְמָמָות אַזְנָן מְסָפָרָ: אַחֲתָה דֵיָא יוֹנָטִי תְּמָנוֹתִי  
 אַחֲתָה דֵיָא לְאַפְהָ בְּרָה קָא לְיוֹלְדָתָה רַאֲתָה בְּנוֹתִי  
 וַיַּאֲשָׁרוּהָ מְלָכָות וְפִילְנִשָּׁים וְיַהֲלָלוּהָ: מִרְזָאת הַגְּשָׁקָפָה  
 בְּמַדְשָׁחָר יִפְהָ בְּלַבְנָה בְּרָה קְחָמָה אִימָה בְּנָדְגָלָות:  
 אַלְגָּתָה אַנוֹן יָרְדָתִי לְרָאֹות בָּאָבִי הַגָּחָל לְרָאֹות הַפְּרָתָה  
 דָּגָפָן הַגָּשִׁי הַרְמָנוֹם: לֹא יָדַעְתִּי נְפָשִׁי שְׁמָתָנִי מְרַבְּבָות  
 עַמִּי נְדִיבָה:

ז

שָׁוְבִי שָׁוְבִי הַשּׁוֹלְמִית שָׁוְבִי שָׁוְבִי וְנַחַחַדְךָ מְהַתְּחַחְדוֹ  
 בְּשִׁׁלְמִית בְּמַחְלָת הַמְּתָנִים: מְהִיאָפָו פָּעַמִּיךָ בְּנַעֲלִים  
 בְּתִנְגָּרִב הַמּוֹקִי יָרְבָּךְ בְּמַוְתָּאִים מַעֲשָׂה בְּרִי אַמְּנוֹ:

שָׁוְבִי שָׁוְבִי the emblem of stateliness and beauty. The point of comparison is a head proudly held

## VI

Where has your beloved gone, O fairest of women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?

My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the flower-beds of balsam, to pasture in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine, who pastures among the lilies.

You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my love, as comely as Jerusalem, as overawing as the most distinguished. Turn your eyes away from me, for they dazzle me. Your hair is like a flock of goats, trailing down from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep, which have come up from the washing; all of them are paired, and not one of them is missing. Your temples are like a slice of pomegranate, behind your veil. There are sixty queens, eighty concubines, and maidens without number; but one alone is my dove, my innocent one; she is the only one of her mother; she is her mother's own darling. The maidens look upon her, and bless her; the queens and the concubines praise her. Who is she that appears like the dawn, as beautiful as the moon, as bright as the sun, as overawing as the most distinguished?

I went down to the nut garden, to look at the green plants of the dale, to see if the grapevine was a-budding, whether the pomegranates were in flower. Before I was aware, my fancy set me among the chariots of my noble people.

## VII

Return, return, O Shulammite; return, return, that we may gaze at you.

Why should you gaze at the Shulammite as upon the dance of Mahanaim?

How beautiful are your steps in sandals, O princess; the curves of your thighs are like ornaments made by an artist. Your chest

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My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the flowerbeds of balsam, to gather lilies. I am my beloved's, and he is mine.

How beautiful you are, how pleasing, my love, my delight! Your figure is like a palm tree.

שְׁרֵךְ אֵן דְּסֶנֶּר אַלְחָסֶר דְּמָגָן בְּטַנְךָ עַרְמָתָ חֲפִים  
סְוִנָּה בְּשַׁוְשָׁנִים: שְׁגַי שְׁנִיךְ קְשַׁגְיַי עַפְרִים תָּאַמְיַ אַבְיָה:  
צְאַרְךְ כְּמַנְדָּל דְּשַׁעַנְיךְ בְּרַבּוֹת בְּחַשְׁבָּן עַלְשָׁעָלְ בְּתָ  
רַבְּיִים אַפְּדָ בְּמַנְדָּל הַלְּבָנָן צַוְּפָה פְּנֵי דְּמָשָׁק: רַאֲשָׁךְ  
עַלְקָד בְּכַרְמָל וְדַלְתָּת רַאֲשָׁךְ כְּאַרְזָמָן מַלְךְ אָסּוֹר בְּרַדְתִּים:  
מְוִדְּבִּיטָה וּמְהִרְעָמָת אַדְבָּה בְּתַעֲנוֹנִים: זֹאת קְוִמְתָּדָ  
דְּמַתָּה לְחַמְרָ וְשְׁהִיךְ לְאַשְׁבָּלוֹת: אַמְרָתִי אַעֲלָה בְּתַמְרָ  
אַתְּהָ בְּסִנְגָּו וְזִדְוָגָא שְׁלָךְ בְּאַשְׁכָּלוֹת הַגְּפָן וְרַחַ  
אַפְּדָ בְּפִפְחִים: חַכְּמָד בְּנֵי רַטּוֹב הַזְּלָקָד לְרוֹדָי לְמִשְׁרִים  
הַוּבָב שְׁפָתִי יְשִׁים: אַנְיַ לְּדָדִי וְעַלְיַ תְּשִׁוְרָה: לְכָה רַוְּדָ  
גַּזְאַה הַשְׁׁדָה גַּלְיָה בְּכִפְרִים: נְשַׁבְּמָה לְכַרְמִים גַּרְאָה  
אַמְּפָרָה הַגְּפָן פְּתַח דְּסֶמֶלֶר הַגְּזָעָה הַרְמָנוֹת שָׁם אַתָּן  
אַתְּדָעָךְ לְךָ: כְּהִזְדָּאִים נִתְנְדָרִיךְ וְעַלְ-פְּתַחְתָּוּנָה פְּלַמְּנִילִים  
חֲדָשִׁים גַּמְּשִׁינִים דְּזָהִי צְפָנִתִּי לְךָ:

## ח

מֵי יָתַנְךְ בָּאָתָה לְיַזְלֵק שְׁנִי אַמְצָאךְ בְּחַוֵּל אַשְׁקָךְ  
גַּם לְאַיְגָו לִי: אַנְגָּךְ אַבְיָאָךְ אַלְכִּית אַמְיַ הַלְּמָדָעִי  
**אַשְׁקָךְ מִין הַרְקָח מִעֲסִים רַמְנִי: שְׁמַאֲלָה תְּחַת רַאֲשָׁךְ**

... She points out incidents and places that are memorable to both of them.

signet ring, engraved with the owner's name or some design. The seal, affixed as signature to letters and documents, was worn on the finger or was strung on a cord and hung around the neck. She wishes to be united in the closest way with her beloved.

is like a round goblet ever filled with wine; your body is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like a tower of ivory; your eyes are like the pools of Heshbon, at the gate of Bathrabim; your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus. Your head is on you like Carmel, and the hair of your head is like purple; the king is held captive in its tresses. How beautiful, how sweet you are, O love's delight! This stature of yours is like a palm tree, and your breasts like clusters. I say: I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its branches; let your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like that of apples, and your soft speech like the best wine—flowing smoothly for my beloved, gliding over the lips of those about to sleep.

I am my beloved's, and his longing is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go into the field, let us stay in the villages; let us go early to the vineyards, to see whether the grapevine has budded, whether the vine blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give my love to you. The love-plants yield their fragrance, and at our doors are all kinds of precious fruits, both new and old, which I have kept for you, my beloved.

## VIII

O that you were my brother, who had been nursed by my mother! I would meet you in the street and kiss you, and none would despise me. I would lead you and bring you into my mother's house, that you might instruct me; I would give you some spiced wine to drink, some of my pomegranate juice.

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Come, let us go into the fields, let us stay in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards, to see whether the grapevine has budded, whether the vine blossoms have opened, whether the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give my love to you.

Love is strong as death itself; its flashes are flashes of fire, a flame of the Lord. Floods cannot quench love, rivers cannot drown it. If a man offered all his wealth for love, he would be utterly scorned.

וַיָּמִינָה תְּחִבְקָנִי: הַשְׁבָעָתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּנֵות יְרוּשָׁלָם מִהְתַּעֲזָרוֹן  
וּמִהְתַּעֲרֹנוֹ אֶתְהָאַבָּהָה עַד שְׁתַחְפֵץ: מֵזֶאת עַלְהָ  
מִזֶּה מִדָּבָר מִתְרָפְקַת עַלְדֹּזָה פָּתַח הַפְּתַח עַוְרָתָךְ  
שְׁמָה חַבְלָתְךָ אַפְּךָ שְׁמָה חַבְלָתְךָ יַלְדָתְךָ: שִׁימְנִי כְּחוֹתָם  
עַלְלָבָךְ כְּחוֹתָם עַלְזְרוֹנָךְ קְרַעָתָךְ כְּמֹתָא אַבָּהָה קְשָׁה  
כְּשָׁאָיל כְּנָאָה רְשָׁפְתָה רְשָׁפְתִי אַשׁ שְׁלִיבָתִיךְ: מִים רְבִים  
לֹא יִכְלֹו לְכֹבֶת אֶתְדָאַדְבָּה וְנִדְרוֹת לֹא יְשַׁטְּפָתָה אַם  
יְהָן אַיִש אֶתְכְּלִידָן בַּיּוֹתְאַדְבָּה בָּהּ יְבֹחוּ לֹא: אַחֲתָת  
לְנֵי קְטָנוֹ וְשָׁדִים אַזְנֵי לְהָ מְהִינָּשָׁה לְאַחֲתָנָה בַּיּוֹם  
שְׁזִכְרָבָה: אַסְבָּוֹמָה הִיא נְבָנָה עַלְהָ טִירָת קְסִיף  
וְאַסְדָּלָת הִיא נְצֹור עַלְהָ לְתַחְ אַרְחָ: אַגְּנָה וְשָׁדָה  
בְּמִנְדָּלָות אוֹ רְיִיתִי בְּעֵינֵי קְמֹצָאת שְׁלָוָם: כְּרָם הַהָּה  
לְשִׁלְמָה בְּכַעַל הַמִּזְן עַתָּן אֶתְדְּבָרָם לְנָטְרִים אַיִש יְבָא  
בְּפֶרַז אַלְפִּי קְסִיף: כְּרָמִי שָׁלִי לְפָנֵי דָאַלְפִּי לְקָדְשָׁה  
מְאַתִּים לְנָטְרִים אֶתְפְּרִיוֹן: הַוּשְׁבָת בְּגָנוֹם דְּבָרִים  
מְקַשְּׁבִים לְקוֹלֵךְ הַשְּׁמַעַי: בְּרָחָה דָוִי וְדָמְהִילְךָ לְצָבִי  
אוֹ לְעַפְרָה דְּאַלְיָם עַל דָּרִי בְּשָׁקִים:

שְׁלִיבָתָה a flame of supernatural, stupendous power.

אַוּתָה was the speech of her brothers in the past, when she was still too young to marry. She recalls having heard them say that they would reward her modesty with adornments and provide strong protection in the case of any sign of moral weakness.

... אִם חָוָה הִיא ... that is, if she preserves her innocence, we will reward her.

כְּרָם הִיא that is, his possession is prized more than Solomon's highly-cultivated vineyard with all its rich revenues.

בְּרָחָה דָוִי is a repetition of her song in 2:17. Allegorically, it is a prayer addressed to God: Mayest thou hasten to reappear on Mount Moriah.

O that his left hand were under my head, and his right hand were embracing me! I adjure you, maidens of Jerusalem, do not stir up, do not rouse love, until it please.

Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?

I woke you under the apple tree, where your mother had been in travail with you, where she had brought you forth. Place me like a seal upon your heart, like a seal upon your arm. Indeed, love is strong as death itself, ardent love is severe as the grave; its flashes are flashes of fire, a flame of the Lord. Floods cannot quench love, rivers cannot drown it; if a man offered all the wealth of his house for love, he would be laughed aside.

We have a young sister, and she has no breasts yet; but what shall we do with our sister when she will be asked in marriage? If she is a wall, we will build a silver turret on her; but if she is a door, we will inclose her with cedar boards.

Now I am a wall, and my breasts like towers, then I should win his favor.

Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he gave over the vineyard to caretakers; each would bring in a thousand silver pieces for its fruits. I keep my vineyard to myself; you, Solomon, are welcome to the thousand shekels, and the caretakers of the fruit to the two hundred shekels.

O you who sit in the gardens, the companions are listening to your voice; let me hear it too!

Make haste, my beloved, be like a gazelle, or like a young deer, on the mountains of spices.

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The site of Baalhamon has not been identified. According to Rashi, it was in the neighborhood of Jerusalem. The name Baalhamon is suggestive of the throngs (*hamon*) of visitors that the place attracted. The extent of Solomon's vineyard at Baalhamon has been calculated from the number of tenants, each of whom paid a thousand silver pieces annually for the use of its fruit.

## רות

א

בְּנָהִי בַּיּוֹם שִׁפְטָת הַשָּׁפְטִים וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ וַיָּלֹךְ אִישׁ  
מִבֵּית לְחֵם יְהוּדָה לְנָדָר בְּשָׁרוֹן מוֹאָב הוּא וְאֶשְׁתּוֹ וְשָׁנָה  
בָּנָיו: וַיָּעַם הָאִישׁ אֶלְמָלֵךְ וַיְשַׁם אֶשְׁתּוֹ נָעָמִי וַיִּשְׁמַע  
בָּנָיו מְחַלֵּן וּכְלַיּוֹן אֶפְרַתִּים מִבֵּית לְחֵם יְהוּדָה וְיִבָּא  
שָׁרוֹן מוֹאָב וַיִּחְוֹרְשָׁם: וַיִּמְתַּח אֶלְמָלֵךְ אִישׁ נָעָמִי וְתַשְׁאָר  
הָיָה וְשָׁנָה בָּנָיה: וַיָּשָׁאָר לְחֵם נְשִׁים מִאֲבֹתָה שֶׁם הָאַחֲת  
עַרְפָּה וַיָּעַם דְּשָׁנִית רֹות וַיָּשִׁבוּ שָׁם בְּעֵשֶׂר שָׁנִים: וַיָּמָתֵּה  
גַּם-שָׁנִיתָם מְחַלֵּן וּכְלַיּוֹן וְתַשְׁאָר הָאָשָׁה מִשְׁנָה יְלָדָה  
וּמִאִשָּׁה: וַתָּקַם הָיָא וּכְלַתָּה וַתַּשְׁבַּט מִשְׁׁךְ מוֹאָב בֵּי  
שְׁמֻעוֹל בְּשָׁרוֹן מוֹאָב כִּירְפָּךְ יְהוּדָה אֶת-עַמּוֹ לְתַת לְחֵם  
לְחֵם: וַתֵּצֵא מִן-הָמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִזְהִרְשָׁה וַתַּעֲתִיד כְּלַתָּה  
עַמָּה וַתִּלְכֹּנָה בְּלַדְךְ לְשִׁובָּה אֶל-אֶרְץ יְהוּדָה: וַיַּאֲמַר נָעָמִי

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The book of Ruth forms part of the synagogue service on *Shavuoth*, the festival commemorating the Revelation at Mount Sinai, for the following two reasons: the festival is described both as *חג הַבְּכוּרִים* (festival of the first fruits) and *וְחג מַן תּוֹרָה* (festival of giving the Torah). The harvest figures prominently in the story of Ruth, who accepted the law of life prescribed in

## R U T H

### I

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to reside in the country of Moab, along with his wife and his two sons. The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and his two sons were called Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites of Bethlehem in Judah. They arrived in the country of Moab and stayed there.

Elimelech the husband of Naomi died, and she was left with her two sons, who married Moabite women, one named Orpah, and the other Ruth. They stayed there about ten years. Both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was bereft of her two children and her husband. She then set out with her daughters-in-law to return home from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the land of Moab that the Lord had remembered his people and given them bread.

She set out from the place where she was, along with her daughters-in-law; but, as they went on the way to return to the land of Judah, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law:

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the Torah when she accompanied her mother-in-law Naomi, married Boaz and became the ancestress of King David.

It is generally agreed that the book of Ruth is one of the most delightful stories ever written. It contains a beautiful example of filial devotion and demonstrates the reward for its practice by an alien, who has been better to Naomi her mother-in-law than seven sons. In Ruth we find a daughter clinging to her parent with true-hearted affection, being ready and willing to share Naomi's distress and loneliness. She is favored by God and men, and chosen by the influential Boaz of Bethlehem to be his wife. The young lonely widow of the first chapter is changed into a joyful mother of children in the last chapter. Her boy grows up to become the ancestor of the royal house of David.

לְשֹׁתִי בְּלֹתִיחַ לְבָנָה שְׁבָנָה אֲשֶׁר לְבֵית אַמְּתָה יִעַשֶּׂה וְהַזָּה  
עַמְּכֶם חָסֵד בָּאֲשֶׂר עַשְׂתֶּם עַמְּדָמְתִים וְעַמְּדִי: וַתִּזְהַזֵּה  
לְכֶם וּמִצְאֵן מִנוּחָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּית אִישָׁה וְתַשְׁקֵךְ לְהַזֵּה וְתַשְׁאַנְהֵה  
קוֹלֵן וְתַבְלִינֵה: וְתַאֲמְרֵנָה לְהָה קְרָאֵתךְ נִשְׁׁוֹב לְעַמְּךָ:  
וְתַאֲמֵר נְעַמֵּי שְׁבָנָה בְּנֵתֵי לְפָה תַּלְכֵנָה עַמֵּי הַעֲדָלִי  
בְּנִים בְּמַעַי וְהַזָּו לְכֶם לְאָנָשִׁים: שְׁבָנָה בְּנֵתֵי לְכֶן בַּי  
וְקִנְתֵּן מְהֻוּות לְאִישׁ בַּי אָמְרָתַי יְשַׁלְּיָה תְּקֹהָ נִסְמַחַת  
הַלִּילָה לְאִישׁ וְגַם יְלִיחַת בְּנִים: הַלְּהֵן תְּשִׁבְרִנָּה עַד  
אֲשֶׁר יָגַדְלוּ הַלְּהֵן תְּעִנְגֵּה לְבָלְתִּי חַיּוֹת לְאִישׁ אֶל בְּנֵתֵי  
בְּרִמְדָלִי מָאָר מְלָם קִרְיַצָּה בַּי דִּידָּה: וְתַשְׁנֵה קִלְלָה  
וְתַבְקִינָה עַד וְתַשְׁקֵךְ עַרְפָּה לְחַמּוֹתָה וְרוֹת דְּבָקָה:  
וְתַאֲמֵר הָנָה שְׁבָה יְכַטְּךְ אַלְעָמָה וְאַלְאַלְתָּה שְׁבוּ  
אַחֲרֵי יְבָמָה: וְתַאֲמֵר רֹת אַלְתְּפִגְעָרְבִּי לְאַזְבָּךְ לְשֹׁוב  
מְאַחֲרֵךְ בַּי אַלְאָשֵׁר תַּלְכֵי אַלְךְ וּבְאַשְׁר תַּלְיֵי אַלְיֵין עַמְּךָ  
עַמְּיָה וְאַלְתָּה אַלְדָּה: בְּאַשְׁר תִּמְהֹתִי אָמֹת וְשָׁם אַקְבָּר  
כְּה יִעַשֶּׂה וְהַזָּה לִי וְכָה יְסִיף בַּי רָמּוֹת יְפָרֵד בֵּינֵי וּבֵינֶךָ:  
וְתַרְא בְּרִמְתָאַמְצָת הָיָא לְלִכְתָּא אַתָּה וְתַחַדְלֵל לְדִבְרֵךְ אַלְדָּה:  
וְתַלְכֵנָה שְׁתִיָּם עַד בְּוֹאָנָה בֵּית לְהָם וְהִי בְּבָנָה בֵּית

קרוי: עיל

The good qualities of Ruth are described as follows: she was careful to ask permission; she worked steadily, not resting during the hot hours of the day. She acknowledged herself an alien, destitute of right or claims; but Boaz commended the wisdom and affection which had brought her to take refuge under the protecting wings of the God of Israel.

In *Midrash Ruth*, Elimelech is described unfavorably and his name is interpreted as meaning "to me belongs royalty." He left Eretz Israel during the famine because he was afraid that the people might apply to him for help. Interpreting the very first words of the book of Ruth, the *Midrash*

"Go back, each of you, to your mother's house. May the Lord treat you kindly, as you have treated the dead and myself. May the Lord grant that each of you find rest in the home of a husband." Then she kissed them; but they wept loudly and said to her: "No, we will go back with you to your people." Naomi said: "Turn back, my daughters, why should you go with me? Have I other sons in my womb to be your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way; I am too old to have a husband. If I were to say that I had hope, if I even had a husband this night and bore sons, would you wait on till they were grown? Would you let this restrain you from marrying? No, my daughters, my plight is too bitter, worse than yours, for the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me." Again they wept aloud; Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodby, but Ruth clung to her.

Then she said: "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; go back with your sister-in-law." But Ruth said: "Entreat me not to leave you and to turn back from following you; wherever you go, I will go; wherever you stay, I will stay; your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God; wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. [I swear], may the Lord do so and so to me, and worse, if anything but death part you and me." When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

The two went on till they reached Bethlehem. When they

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tries to show that the famine occurred at a time when the people judged their judges, who perverted justice and were held responsible by the citizens.

The names of the persons mentioned in the book of Ruth seem to describe the characters of Naomi (pleasant), Mahlon (sickly), Chilion (wasting away), Orpah (turning her back on Naomi), Ruth (friend), Boaz (nimble, fleet). Naomi's bitterness ("call me Marah") yields to hope and gratitude.

לְהַמִּן וּמִתְלָמִים בְּלִידָהָעֵיר עַלְיהָן וְתוֹאמְרָנָה הַזֹּאת נָעֵמִי : וְתוֹאמְרָ אֶלְיהָן אֶלְתְּקַרְאָנָה לֵי נָעֵמִי קְרָאָן לֵי מְרָאָ כָּרָה כְּמַר שְׂדֵי לֵי מְאָד : אֲנֵי מְלָאָה הַלְּבָטִי וּרְיקָס הַשְּׁיבָנִי הַזֹּהָה לְמַה חִלְקָרָאָנָה לֵי נָעֵמִי וְנִזְוָה עֲנָה בֵּי וְשְׂדֵי הַרְבָּעָה לֵי : וְתַשְׁבֵּן נָעֵמִי וְרוֹת הַמּוֹאָבִיה בְּכַלְתָּה עַמָּה הַשְּׁבָרָה מְשֻׁרִי מְיַאָב וְהַמָּה בָּאוּ בֵּית לְהַמִּן בְּתִחְלַת קָצִיר שָׁעָרִים :

## ב

וְלִנְעֵמִי מְזַדֵּע לְאִישָּׁה אִישׁ גָּבוֹר חִילְמָלֵך וְשְׁמָנוּ בָּעוּ : וְתוֹאמְרָ רֹות הַמּוֹאָבִיה אֶלְנָעֵמִי אֶלְכְּהָרָנָא הַשְּׁרָה וְאֶלְקַטָּה בְּשְׁבָלִים אַחֲרָ אֲשֶׁר אֲמַצָּאָהָן בְּעִינֵינוּ וְתוֹאמְרָ לָהּ לְכִי בְּתִי : וְתַלְקֵד וְתַבּוֹא וְתַלְקֵט בְּשְׁרָה אַחֲרָ תַּקְלָצִים וַיַּקְרֵר מִקְרָדָה חִלְקָת הַשְּׁרָה לְבָעוּ אַשְׁר מְמִשְׁפָּחָה אַלְמָלָה : וְהַנְּדַבְּעוּ בָּא מִקְבֵּית לְהַמִּן וְיַאֲמֵר לְקַדְצִים יְהֹוָה עַמְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוּ יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהֹוָה : וַיֹּאמְרָ בָּעוּ לְנִעְרוּ הַנִּצְבָּע עַלְהַקְדּוּצִים לְמִי הַנְּעָרָה הַזֹּאת : וַיַּעֲזִין הַנְּעָר הַנִּצְבָּע עַלְהַקְדּוּצִים וַיֹּאמֶר נִעְרָה מִוּאָבִיה דָּיוֹה הַשְּׁבָה עַמְּנָעֵמִי מְשֻׁרִי מְיַאָב : וְתוֹאמְרָ אֶלְקַטָּה הָנָא וְאַסְפֵּטִי בְּעָמְרִים אַחֲרָ דְּקַדְצִים וְתַבּוֹא וְתַעֲמֵד מִאוֹ הַבְּקָר וְעַד-עַתָּה וְהַשְּׁבָתָה .

קרִי: מְזַדֵּע.

Bethlehem-Judah was but a short distance from Moab, which was a fertile country in the early biblical period. Only a famine could have induced a Hebrew to migrate into this foreign land where he would have no right of citizenship.

The women-servants of Boaz are referred to as going over the ground after the reapers. Much would be wasted if this supplementary work were not performed, since the manner of reaping was quite slovenly in those primi-

arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was astir over them. The women said: "Is this Naomi?" But she said to them: "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Lord has made it very bitter for me; I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty-handed. Why do you call me Naomi? The Lord has turned against me; and the Almighty has brought disaster on me."

So Naomi returned with her Moabite daughter-in-law, Ruth, who accompanied her back from the country of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## II

Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a brave man of wealth, who belonged to the family of Elimelech; his name was Boaz. Now, Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi: "Let me go to the field and glean ears of grain behind a reaper with whom I may find favor." So Naomi said to her: "Go, my daughter." When she went and gleaned in the field after the harvesters, she happened to come upon that part of the field which belonged to Boaz, of the family of Elimelech. Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the harvesters: "The Lord be with you!" They replied: "May the Lord bless you!" Then Boaz asked the foreman of the reapers: "Whose girl is this?" The foreman replied: "It is the Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab; she asked to be allowed to glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers. She came and has continued working from early morning until now, with scarcely a moment's rest inside the house."

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tive times. The young men are the harvesters from all parts of the country, and are apt to be loose in conduct.

The harvesters in the Near East still dip their bread in vinegar and

הבית מזט: ויאמר בז אולדות הלא שמעת בפי  
אל-חלבי ללקט בשדה אחר ונם לא-תעכורי מה וכח  
תרכזון עס-נערתי: עזיך בשדה אשר-יקצرون והלבת  
אחריך הלא אצתי את-הנערים לבלתי נגער וצמתה  
והלבת אל-דבלים ושתית מאשר ישאבן הנערים: ותפל  
על-פניה ותשתחוו ארצה ותאמר אליו מודיע מזאתי חן  
בעיניך להכירני ואני נבריה: יען בז ויאמר לה רגער  
הניד ליל אל-אשר-עשיה אתח-המודך את-ה מות אישך  
וועזבי אביך ואמך וארץ מולדך ותלבוי אל-עם אשר  
לא-דעתה חמול שלשים: שלם זהה קעלך ותהי  
משברך שלמה מעם זהה אל-הו ישראל אשר-באת  
לחסוט החרט-כני: ותאמר אמצע-הו בעיניך אדני כי  
וחמפני ווי רברת על-לב שפחתך ואני לא אהיה באחת  
שפחתך: ויאמר לה בז לעת הדאבל גשי גלים ואכלת  
מן-ה-לדים וטבלת פוך בחמץ ותשבל מזד הקצרים  
ויבטלה קלי ותאכל ותשבע ותתר: ותקם ללקט ויצו  
בז את-העריו לאמר גם בין העם-ים תלקם ולא  
תבלימה: ונס שלחת-על לה מז-אכתיים ועוכתם

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find it very refreshing. Parched corn is their favorite food. The ears of grain, when not quite ripe, are roasted on an iron plate, or are thrust in small bundles into a fire of dry grass. The crusty flavor about it makes pleasant eating.

As a special favor, Ruth is allowed to glean among the standing sheaves, before they have been removed. The thirsty, affectionate Ruth carries to Naomi the parched grain which remained over from her midday meal, much in the manner of poor women taking home food from some feast which has been given them.

Then Boaz said to Ruth: "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field, do not leave this one, but keep here close to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them up; I have ordered the young men not to molest you. Whenever you are thirsty, go to the cans and drink what the young men have drawn." Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him: "Why have I, a foreigner, found favor with you that you should take notice of me." But Boaz answered her: "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for what you have done. May you receive a rich reward from the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" She said: "May I prove worthy of your kindness; you have comforted me, your servant, and spoken consolingly to me, though I am not like one of your maids."

At mealtime, Boaz said to her: "Come here, eat some food; dip your bread in the vinegar." Then as she sat beside the reapers, he handed her some roasted grain; she ate till she was satisfied, and had some left over. She got up to glean, and Boaz instructed his servants, saying: "Let her glean even among the sheaves and do not scold her. Pull out even some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to glean; do not rebuke her."

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According to Leviticus 25:25, 47-48, if an Israelite was compelled by poverty to dispose of his property, the seller's kinsman could compel the purchaser to sell it back to him, so as to preserve each family in possession of its land.

Levirate marriage, or the obligation of marrying the deceased brother's widow, aimed at preventing the extinction of the dead man's name and was

ולקתה ולא חנערדקה; ותלקט בשעה ערד-הערב ותחבט את אַשְׁר-לְקָטָה וַיְהִי בְּאֵיפָה שְׁעָרִים: ותשא ותבוא חער ותרא חמותה את אַשְׁר-לְקָטָה ותצא ותתדרלה את אַשְׁר-זָוָתָה מִשְׁבָּעָה: ותאמֶר לָהּ חִמּוֹתָה אֵיפָה לְקָטָתָה הַיּוֹם וְאֵתָה עָשָׂית יְהִי מִכְיָר בְּרוּךְ ותגַּד לְחִמּוֹתָה את אַשְׁר-עָשָׂתָה עָמָו ותאמֶר שֵׁם דָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂיתִי עָמָו הַיּוֹם בְּעַזְוָן: ותאמֶר נָעָמִי לְכָלָתָה בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְדַבָּה אֲשֶׁר לְאַעֲבָר חַסְדָו אַתְּ-הַתְּשִׁים וְאַתְּ-הַמְּתִים ותאמֶר לָהּ נָעָמִי קָרוּב לְנוּ הָאִישׁ מִנְאָלָנוּ הָאָזָן: ותאמֶר רֹות הַמְּוֹאָבִיהָ נָעָמִי כִּירָאָמָר אֶלְיָהָבֶן עַמְּדָה-עַמְּרָים אַשְׁר-דָלִי תְּדַבֵּרְלֵין עַד אַמְּדָבְלֵוָה אֶת בְּלַהֲקָצִיר אַשְׁר-דָלִי: ותאמֶר נָעָמִי אַלְנָוָות בְּלַתָּה טֻוָב בְּתוֹכֵי תְּצָאֵי עַמְּנָעָרוֹתָיו וְלֹא יִפְגַּע-רָבָךְ בְּשָׂהָרָה אַחֲרָה: ותְּדַבֵּק בְּנָעָרוֹת בְּעַזְוָן לְלַקְטָת עַרְבָּלוֹת קָצִיר-בְּשָׁעָרִים וּקְצִיר הַחֲטִים ותַּשְׁבַּת אַתְּ-חִמּוֹתָה:

## ג

וְתָאָמֶר לָהּ נָעָמִי חִמּוֹתָה בְּתוֹכֵי דָלָא אַבְקָשׁ-דָלָךְ מִנוּחָה אֲשֶׁר יִטְבַּ-דָלָךְ: וְעַתָּה הַלָּא בְעַזְוָן מִדְעָתָנוּ אֲשֶׁר דַיָּת אַתְּ נָעָרוֹתָיו הַוְהַ-הָוָא וְרָה אַתְּ-גָרָן הַשְׁעָרִים הַלִּילָה: וְרַחַצְתָּ וְסַבַּת וְשִׁמְתָּ שְׁמַלְתָּךְ עַלְךְ וְבָרָתָי דָגָרָן אַלְ תַּזְעִזְלָאָישׁ עַד בְּלַתָּו לְאַכְלָל וְלִשְׁתָותָו: יְהִי בְּשַׁבְּבוֹ וְדַעַת אַתְּ-הַמִּקְומָם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּבְ-שָׁם וּבְאָתָה וְגַלְתָּ מִרְגַּלְתָּו

קרוי: שְׁלִיחָה. וְרָתָה.

designed to save the property belonging to a family from being dispersed among other families. The firstborn son of the levirate marriage was con-

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She took it up and went into the town, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. Then Ruth brought out and gave her what she had left over from lunch. Her mother-in-law asked her: "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? May the man who took notice of you be blessed!" So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said: "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law: "May he be blessed by the Lord, who is ever kind to the living and to the dead." She then told her: "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." And Ruth the Moabitess said: "He even told me: You shall keep close to my servants, till they have finished all my harvesting." Naomi then said to her daughter-in-law Ruth: "You will do well, my daughter, to accompany his maids, lest you be molested in some other field." So she kept close to the girls of Boaz, gleaning until the end of both barley and wheat harvests; she lived with her mother-in-law.

### III

Then her mother-in-law Naomi said to her: "My daughter, I must seek a home for you, that you may fare well. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, with whose maids you have been working. Tonight he is winnowing barley in the threshing-floor. Wash and anoint yourself; put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor. Do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. But when he lies down, take note of the place where he lies. Then go in, uncover

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sidered to be the son and heir of the man who died childless (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

וְשַׁבְבָתִי וְזֹא יָצַד לְךָ אֶת אָשֶׁר פָּצַשְׁׁוּ: וְתֹאמֶר אֶלְךָ  
בְּלִ אָשְׁר-תֹּאמֶר: אַעֲשָׂה: וְתַרְדֵּת הַגָּן וְתַעֲשֵׂה כָּל  
אָשְׁר-צִוָּה חֲמֹתָה: נִאכְלֵל בַּעַנְשָׂתִי וְיִתְבַּלֵּס לִבְנֵי נִבְאָה  
לְשַׁבָּב בְּקָצָה הַגְּרָמָה וְתַבָּא בְּלַט וְתַגְלִיל מִרְגָּלָת יְוָתָם שְׁבָבָן  
וַיְהִי בְּחֵצֵי הַלְּיָלָה נִתְחַדֵּד הָאִישׁ וַיַּלְּפַת וַיַּהַנֵּה אָשָׁה  
שְׁבָבָת מִרְגָּלָתָו: וַיֹּאמֶר מִידָּאת וְתֹאמֶר אָנֹכִי רֹות אַמְתָּךְ  
וְפָרָשָׂת בְּגַפְךְ עַל-אַמְתָּךְ כִּי נָאֵל אַתָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּכָה  
אַתָּה לְזִדְחָה בְּתֵי הַיּוּבָת חַסְדָּךְ הַאַחֲרָן מִזְהָרָאָשָׁן  
לְכַלְתִּירָלָבָת אַחֲרֵי תַּבְחוֹרִים אַמְצָל וְאַסְמָעָרָה: וְעַתָּה  
בְּתַחַי אַל-תַּחַרְאֵי כָּל אָשְׁר-תֹּאמֶר אַעֲשֵׂה-לְךָ כִּי יַדְעֵל כָּל  
שַׁעַר עַמִּי כִּי אַשְׁתֵּחַל אַתָּה: וְעַתָּה כִּי אַמְנָמָם כִּי אָמֵן נָאֵל  
אָנֹכִי וְעַם יְשָׁעָה נָאֵל קָרוּב מִמְּנָיו: לְנַיִן הַלְּיָלָה וְתַהֲרָה  
בְּבָקָר אַסְיַנְגָּלֵךְ טֹב וְנָאֵל וְאַסְמָלָא חַפְצָן-לְנָאֵל  
וְנָאַתָּחָד אָנֹכִי תִּרְדִּזָּה שְׁכָבֵי עַד-הַבָּקָר: וְתַשְּׁבֵב מִרְגָּלָתָן  
עַד-הַבָּקָר וְתַקְסֵם בְּטַרְוָם יַכְרֵר אִישׁ אַתְּדָעָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-  
יְהֹוָה בְּרִכָּה הָאָשָׁה הַגָּן: וַיֹּאמֶר הָבֵי רַמְטָפָחָת אֲשֶׁר-  
עַלְךָ וְאַחֲרָךָ וְתַאֲחֵז בָּהּ וַיִּמְדְּשֵׁשָׁעָרִים וַיְשַׁתֵּעַלְיהָ  
תַּבָּא הַעִיר: וַתִּבְאָה אַל-חֲמֹתָה וְתֹאמֶר מִרְאָת בְּתִי  
וְתַגְרַלְהָ אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה-לָהּ הָאִישׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁשָׁ  
הַשְׁעָרִים דָּאַלָּה גַּתְנֵן לִי כִּי אָמַר... אַל-תִּבְאַי רִיקָּם אֶל-  
הַמּוֹתָךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁכֵי בְּתִי עַד אֲשֶׁר פְּרָעָן אַיְדֵי יַפְלֵל  
דָּבָר כִּי לֹא יִשְׁקַט דָּאִישׁ כִּי אַסְיַבָּלָה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

לְרִי: וְשַׁבָּבָת אַמְרָיו אַלְיָה כִּי טָלָה. פְּרָגָלָתִי. בְּגָרָם. אַפְּרָ אַלְיָה.

Grain is winnowed in the evening, to take advantage of the cool sea-wind, which blows in Eretz Yisrael from 4 o'clock in the afternoon to half-an-hour before sunset. The threshing floor is generally on an elevated spot. The town

his feet, and lie down; he will tell you what to do." Ruth replied: "I will do whatever you say." So she went down to the threshing-floor and did exactly as her mother-in-law had instructed her.

Boaz ate and drank to his heart's content, and went to lie down at the end of the grain heap. Then she came in noiselessly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. In the middle of the night, however, the man was startled and bent forward; there was a woman lying at his feet. He asked: "Who are you?" And she replied: "I am your servant Ruth; now spread your robe over your servant, for you are a near kinsman." He said: "May the Lord bless you, my daughter; this last kindness of yours is even greater than the first, in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. Have no fear, my daughter; I will do for you all that you ask; all my townspeople know that you are a good woman. Now, it is true that I am a near kinsman, but there is a nearer kinsman than myself. Stay as you are for tonight, and in the morning, if he will claim you as your nearest kin, well and good; let him do a kinsman's duty. But if he will not do his duty as a kinsman to you, I will claim you myself, as the Lord lives. Lie down until morning." So she lay at his feet until morning, but rose before men could recognize one another. Boaz said: "Let it not be known that this woman came to the threshing-floor." Then he said to her: "Bring the mantle you are wearing and hold it open." So she held it open, and he poured out six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her back; then he went into the town.

Ruth came home to her mother-in-law, who asked: "How did you fare, my daughter?" So she told her all that the man had done for her, saying: "He gave me these six measures of barley, because he said: Do not come back to your mother-in-law empty-handed." Naomi then said: "My daughter, wait until you learn what happens, for the man will not rest till he settles the matter today."

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of Bethlehem, however, is situated on the summit of the mountain range, hence it was necessary to go down to the threshing floor, which was an open space of clean, hard, dry ground.

ובנֶעֶלְתָה הַשְׁעָר וַיֵּשֶׁב שָׁם וְהַגָּה הַגָּאֵל עַבְרֵל אֲשֶׁר דָבָר  
בָּנֶו וַיֹּאמֶר סָדָה שְׁבָה דְבָרָה פָּלָנִי אַלמָנִי נִסְרֵת מִשְׁבָּבָה:  
וַיָּלַח עֲשָׂרָה אֲנָשִׁים מִזְקָנֵי הָעִיר וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁבָה דְבָרָה וְמִשְׁבָּבָה:  
וַיֹּאמֶר לְנַאֲלָה חִלְקָת הַשְׁדָה אֲשֶׁר לְאַחֲנָה לְאַלְמָלָךְ  
מִכְבָּה נָעָמִי הַשְׁבָּה מִשְׁדָה מִזְאָב: וְאַנְיָ אַמְרָתִי אַגָּלָה  
אָנוֹנוֹ לְאַמְרָת קָנָה נָגָד הַשְׁבָּבִים וְנוֹגָד וְקָנָה עַמְיָ אַמְתָנָאָלָה  
נַאֲלָה וְאַסְמָלָה יַנְאָל הַגִּזָּה לִי וְאַדְעָה כִּי אָז וּוְלְחָדָל לְאַזְלָל  
וְאַגָּבָה אַחֲרָד וַיֹּאמֶר אַנְבָּי אַנְאָל: וַיֹּאמֶר בָּנֶו בְּוֹסָה  
קָנוֹתָךְ הַשְׁדָה מִזְנָעָמִי וְמִזְאָת רֹות הַמִּזְאָבָה אֲשֶׁר-זָדָה מִתְ  
קָנִיתִי לְהַקִּים שְׁסָדָה מִתְעַלְמָה לְתָחִילָה: וַיֹּאמֶר הַנַּאֲלָל לֹא  
אָכְלָל לְנַאֲלָל-לִי פְּרָדָשָׁה אֲתִינָחָלָה נַאֲלָל-לָךְ אַתָּה אַתָּה  
גַּאֲלָתִי כִּי לֹא-אָכְלָל לְנַאֲלָל: וְזֹאת לִפְנִים בִּשְׂרָאֵל עַל  
הַנַּאֲלָה וּעַל-הַתְּמִרְהָה לְקִים פֶּלְדָּכָר שְׁלָטָה אִישׁ נְעָלָה  
וּנְתַן לְרִנְצָהוּ וְזֹאת הַתְּעוּדָה בִּשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֹּאמֶר הַנַּאֲלָל  
לְבָנָה קָנָה-לָךְ וַיְשַׁלֵּט נְעָלָה: וַיֹּאמֶר בָּנֶו לְזָקִים וּכְלָל  
הַעַם עֲדִים אַתָּם הַיּוֹם כִּי קָנִיתִי אֲתִיכְלָל-אֲשֶׁר לְאַלְמָלָךְ  
וְאַתָּה כְּלָל-אֲשֶׁר לְבָלוֹן וּמְחַלּוֹן מִזְנָעָמִי: וְגַם אֲתִינָרוֹת  
הַמִּאָבָה אֲשֶׁת מְחַלּוֹן קָנִיתִי לִי לְאַשָּׁה לְהַקִּים שְׁסָדָה מִתְ  
עַל-נִחְלָה לְלֹא-יִכְרֹת שְׁסָדָה מִתְ מִעֵם אַחֲיו וּמִשְׁעָר מִקְוָמִי

קָרֵי: וְאַדְעָה.

The grain was winnowed by throwing it up with forks or shovels against the evening breeze, which blew away the chaff, while the heavier grain fell on the ground in a heap. The Torah forbids muzzling the oxen that are driven

## IV

Boaz went up to the town gate and sat down there; and there was the near kinsman of whom Boaz had spoken, passing by. So Boaz called to him by name, saying: "Step aside and sit down here." So he stepped aside and sat down. Then Boaz picked out ten of the elders of the town, and said: "Sit down here," so they sat down. Then he said to the near kinsman: "Naomi, who has come back from the Moabite country, is putting up for sale the piece of land that belonged to our kinsman Elimelech. So I thought I would inform you, and say: Buy it in the presence of those who are sitting here, in the presence of the elders of my people. If you wish to acquire it as next of kin, redeem it; but if you will not claim it as next of kin, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one to claim it as next of kin except yourself, and I come after you." The man said: "I will redeem it." Then Boaz said: "Once you acquire the field from Naomi, you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased man, so as to restore the name of the departed to his estate." The near relative replied: "I cannot take it up, lest I depreciate my own estate. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it."

Now it used to be the custom in Israel that, to make binding a contract of redeeming or exchanging, one party would take off his sandal and give it to the other; this was how exchanges were attested in Israel. So when the near kinsman said to Boaz, "Acquire it for yourself," he drew off his sandal. Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people: "You are witnesses today that I have acquired from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Chilion, and Mahlon. I also take Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, as my wife, in order to

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over the grain spread out on a level threshing floor, open to the air (Deuteronomy 25:4). This command enjoins a kind consideration for the beasts.

קָרִים אֲמָתָם נִלְמָם: וְאַמְנוֹן כְּלִדְעָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּשָׁעָר הַגְּדוּלָם  
עֲדָם: וְתָהָר אַדְמָה אֲתַדְמָה כְּבָאָה אֲלַבְּיָהָר בְּרָהָלָן  
וְבָלָהָר אֲשָׁר בְּנָי שְׁתַדָּם אֲתַדְבָּית שְׁנָרָאָל וְשְׁנָהָדָל  
אֲפָאָרָה וְקָרָאָשָׁם בְּבִיתָה לְדָם: וְתָיָהָר בְּבִיתָה פָּרָח  
אֲשָׁר-יְלָהָר שְׁקָר לְיְהָהָר מְרָדָרָע אֲשָׁר-יְמָהָר לְהָרָהָר  
מְרָדָרָה תָּהָת: וְתָקָה בְּעַיָּהָר אֲתַדְרָה וְתָרָהָר לְאַשָּׁה  
תְּבָא אַלְמָה וְתָהָה יְהָהָר לְהָרָהָר וְתָלָהָר בְּוֹ: וְהָמָרָה  
הָשִׁים אֲלַגְעָמָה בְּרָהָה אֲשָׁר לְאַהֲשָׁבָה לְהָשָׁבָה  
תְּבָא וְקָרָא שָׁמָה בְּיְשָׁאָל: וְתָהָה לְקָרָא לְמָשִׁיב נְפָשָׁת  
וְכָלָל אֲזָרָבָה קָרָא אֲתַדְבָּהָר קָרָא אֲתַדְבָּהָר  
וְכָלָל אֲזָרָבָה קָרָא אֲתַדְבָּהָר קָרָא אֲתַדְבָּהָר  
אֲשָׁר-יְהָהָר פָּוָה קָרָא מְשָׁבָחָה בְּנָים: וְתָקָה יְגָעָמָה אֲדָר  
הָלָר וְתָמָשָׁה בְּחִקָּה וְתָמָשָׁה לְאַמְנוֹת: וְתָמָשָׁה לְהָרָהָר  
הָשִׁבָּה שְׁמָם לְאַמְרָה יְלָהָן לְמָשָׁמָה וְתָמָקָאָה שְׁמָמָעָבָד  
הָאָבָרָשָׁי אֲבִי הָרָה: וְאַלְהָה וְלָרָה קָרָא שְׁרָאָה וְלָרָה  
אֲתַדְצָרָה: וְתָצָרָה דְּלָלָה אֲתַדְרָם וְרָם הָלָלָה אֲדָר  
צְמָרָה: וְצְמָרָה בְּלָלָה אֲתַדְמָשָׁחָה וְמָשָׁחָה הָלָלָה אֲדָר  
שְׁלָמָה: וְשְׁלָמָה הָלָלָה אֲתַדְבָּשָׁע וְבָשָׁע הָלָלָה אֲתַדְעָבָה:  
וְבָרָה הָלָלָה אֲתַדְיָשׁ וְיָשָׁה הָלָלָה אֲתַדְדָה:

*Ploni Almoni*, meaning so-and-so or such-and-such, are two words compounded into one word. *Palmoni* (Daniel 8:13), used where the man's name is unknown.

restore the name of the departed to his estate, so that the name of the deceased may not perish among his kinsmen, from the gate of his native place; you are witnesses this day." Then all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said: "We are witnesses. May the Lord make this woman, who is coming to your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you do well in Ephrathah and win fame in Bethlehem. May your house flourish like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, with the offspring that the Lord will give you from this girl."

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. He went in to her, and the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi: "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a near kinsman; may he become famous in Israel. The child will revive your life and cherish you in your old age; for he is the son of your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better than seven sons to you." Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and became his nurse. The neighbor women gave him a name, saying: "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

These are the descendants of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron of Ram, Ram of Amminadab, Amminadab of Nahshon, Nahshon of Salmon, Salmon of Boaz, Boaz of Obed, Obed of Jesse, and Jesse of David.

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The shoe thrown over the land is a sign that possession is taken (Psalms 60:10; 108:10). The Hebrew word *goel* signifies the next-of-kin whose right it was to redeem his dead relative's property. It was the duty of the *goel* to marry the widow, if the relative had died childless.

# אַיִּכָּה

א

אַיִּכָּה יִשְׁבָּה בָּדָד הַעִילָּרְבָּתִי עַם הַיְהָה כָּאַלְמָנָה  
רַבְתִּי בְּנוֹים שָׁרְתִּי בְּמִדְינוֹת הַיְהָה לִמְסָס: בְּנָיו תַּבְכָּה  
בְּלִילָה וְדָמָעָתָה עַל לְחֹזָה אַיִּצְלָה מַנְחָם מִפְלָאָה בְּרִיבָה  
כְּלִרְעִילָה בְּגַדְיוֹ בָּהּ דָּנוּ לְהָ לְאִיבִים: גַּלְתָּה יְהוָה מָעֵן  
וּמְלָבָעָבָה הָיָה יִשְׁבָה בְּנוֹים לֹא מִצְאָה מְנוּחָה כָּלָל  
רַדְפִּיהָ הַשְׁנִינָה בֵּין הַמִּצְרִים: דָּרְלִי צַיְן אֲבָלוֹת מִפְלָי  
בָּאֵי מַוְעֵד כְּלִשְׁעָרִילָה שׁוֹמְמִין בְּהַנִּיהָ נָאָנָחִים בְּתַולְתִּיהָ  
עֲנָנוֹת הָיָה מַרְלָהָה: הָיָה צָרִיהָ לְרָאשָׁ אִיבִּיהָ שָׁלוּ כָּרָ  
יְהוָה חֹזֶה עַל־לְבָבְךָ פְּשָׁעָה עַזְלָלִיהָ הַלְכָה שְׁבִי לְפָנֵי אָרָ  
וַיֵּצֵא מִקְבְּתָחִצְיָן כְּלִהְבָרְהָה הָיָה שְׁלִיחָה בְּאַיִלִים לְאִמְצָא  
מִרְשָׁה וַיָּלֹכְךָ בְּלָאַבְכָּה לְפָנֵי רַוְּהָה: וְגַהָה יְרוּשָׁלָם יָמִ  
עֲנִיהָ וְמַרְוֹדִיהָ כָּל מַחְמָדִיהָ אֲשֶׁר הָיָה מִמְּמִי קָרְם בְּגַעֲלָה  
קָרְיִי קְבָתָה.

The Hebrew title of the book of Lamentations is derived from the opening word *Ekhah* (How). This word commences the first, second, and fourth of the five chapters of the book. It is in accordance with the custom to name a biblical book by a conspicuous word at or near its beginning. *Lamentations* is the third of the five *Megilloth* (scrolls), and is recited in the synagogue on *Tishah b'Av*, the ninth day of *Av*, in commemoration of the Temple. Tradition assigns the composition of *Lamentations (Kinoth)* to the prophet Jeremiah, who was an eyewitness to the agony of Jerusalem and the despair of

## LAMENTATIONS

### I

- 1 How lonely sits the city, once so full of people!  
Once great among nations has become like a widow;  
Once princess among states has become a vassal.
- 2 Bitterly she weeps in the night, tears upon her cheeks;  
She has no one to comfort her out of all her friends;  
All her friends have betrayed her and become her foes.
- 3 Judah has gone into the misery of exile and harsh servitude;  
Settled among the nations, she has found no resting-place;  
Her pursuers have all overtaken her in the narrow straits.
- 4 The roads to Zion mourn, bereft of arriving festive guests;  
All her gates are deserted, her priests sigh;  
Her maidens are sad, and she is in bitter plight.
- 5 Her foes are now the masters, her enemies are at ease;  
For the Lord has afflicted her because of her many sins;  
Her young children have gone as captives before the enemy.
- 6 All splendor is gone from Zion;  
Her princes have become like stags that find no pasture;  
They walked feebly before the pursuer.
- 7 Jerusalem recalls in the days of her woe and sorrow  
All the precious things that were hers in former days;

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its inhabitants during the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 before the common era.

The book of Lamentations consists of five lyric poems, lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. The first four poems are alphabetic acrostics. The twenty-two strophes of chapters 1, 2, and 4 are introduced by the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet taken in order, as if to express the gamut of sorrow, the totality of grief and hope, from A to Z. The alphabetic acrostics are likewise designed to aid the memory of the people in their distant exile. In the first two chapters, each letter of the alphabet introduces a verse of three lines (1:7 and 2:19 have four). Chapter three is intensified with

עַמְּיה בִּידְצָר וְאַז עַוְּל לְה רָאֵה צְרִים שְׁחַקְוּ עַל  
מִשְׁבְּתָה: חַטָּא חַטָּא הַיּוֹלֶה יַרְשָׁלָם עַלְכֵן לְנִיתָה דָוָתָה בְּלַ  
מִכְפְּרַתָּה חַוְּלָה בְּרִדָּאוּ עַרְתָּה נְסַדְּיוֹ אֲנָחָה וְתַשְּׁבָ  
אַחֲרָה: טְמַאַתָּה בְּשַׁולְדָה לֹא זְכָרָה אַחֲרִיתָה וְתַרְדָּ  
פְּלָאִים אֵין מְנַחַם לְה רָאֵה דָזָה אַתְעַזְזֵי בַּי הַגְּנִיל אַיִבָּה:  
וְדוֹפְרֵשׁ צָר עַל כָּל מִחְמָדָה בְּרִדָּאתָה נְזִים בָּאוּ מִקְדָּשָׁה  
אֲשֶׁר צְוִיתָה לְאַיְבָא בְּקָדְל לְהָדָ: בְּלַעֲמָה נְאָחִים  
מִבְקָשִׁים לְהָם נְתַנְיַ מִחְמָדִירִים בְּאָכְל לְהָשִׁיב נְפָשָׁ  
רָאֵה דָזָה וְתַבְּטָה בַּי דָעִיתִי וְלִלָּה: לֹא אַלְכָם כָּל  
עֲבָרִי דָרְךָ הַבְּיטָה וּרְאָ אַמְּשָׁ מִכְאָבָ בְּמִכְאָבָי אָשָׁר  
עַלְל לְאַשְׁר הוֹגָה דָזָה בַּיּוֹם תְּרִזָּן אַפְוָ: מִמְּרוּם  
שְׁלַחְאָש בְּעַצְמָתִי וְרִזְקָה פְּרֵשׁ בְּרַשְׁת לְרִגְלֵי הַשְּׁבִנִי  
אַחֲרָוּ נְתַנְיַ שְׁמָמָה בְּלַעֲנִים דָזָה: נְשָׁקָר עַל פְּשָׁעָ  
בְּדוֹ יְשַׁהְרָעָן עַלְוָ עַלְצָאָרִי הַכְּשִׁיל פְּדוּ נְתַנְיַ אֲדָנִי  
בְּדוֹ לְאַאֲכֵל קָוָם: סְלָה בְּלַאֲבָדִי אֲרָנִי בְּקָרְבִּי קְרָא  
עַל מִזְעֵד לְשִׁבְרָה בְּחוּרִי יָתְדָק אֲדָנִי לְבַתּוּלָת בְּרָתִ  
דָזָה: עַלְאָלָה אֲנִי בּוֹכֵה עַיִינִי עַיִינִי יְרָה פְּמָם בְּרָ  
דָזָה מִפְעֵז מְנַחַם מִשְׁבָּב נְפָשִׁי דָזָה בְּנֵי שְׁוֹמְמִים קֵי גְּבָר  
אַיִבָּה: פְּרִשָּׁה צַיְן בְּדָזָה אֵין מְנַחַם לְה דָזָה וְהָה לְעַזְקָב  
סְבִּיבָיו אֲרוּ הַיּוֹתָה יְרֹשָׁלָם לְנִיהָ בְּגִידָם: אַדְיק דָזָה  
דָזָה בְּרִפְדוֹ מְגִירִי שְׁמַעְנָא כָל עַמּוּם וּרְאָוּ מִכְאָבָי  
בְּחַוְלָתִי וּבְחוּרִי הַלְּכָה בְּשָׁבִי: קְרָאָתִי לְמַאֲתָבִי הַמְּהָ

קר. קְמַפְרִידִים. הַעֲמִים.

a triple acrostic, with each letter introducing each of the three successive verses. Chapters two and four have an unusual alphabetic order, with the letter **ב** before the letter **י**. The fifth and last poem is not an alphabetic acrostic; it consists, however, of twenty-two verses, corresponding to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

When her people fell helpless into the enemy's hand,  
Foes gazed gloating at her downfall.

8 Jerusalem sinned greatly, therefore she became an outcast;  
All who honored her despise her, for they see her disgrace;  
She, too, can only sigh while turning away.

9 Impurity clung to her skirts, she gave no thought to her end;  
She has dropped miraculously, with no one to comfort her.  
Look down, O Lord, upon my affliction; the foe has triumphed!

10 The enemy has laid hands on everything dear to her;  
She has seen pagans invade her shrine,  
Men thou didst forbid to enter thy community.

11 All her people sigh, begging for bread;  
They have bartered their treasures for food, to keep alive;  
Look down, O Lord, and see how gluttonous I have become!

12 May it never happen to you, all you wayfarers!  
Look about and see if there is an agony like mine,  
Which the Lord dealt out to me on the day of his wrath.

13 From above he sent a fire down into my bones;  
He spread a net for my feet, he has thwarted me;  
He has abandoned me desolate, in long-drawn pain.

14 Compressed by his hand is the yoke of my offenses;  
They are knit together, coming up to my neck;  
The Lord consigned me to a foe that I cannot withstand.

15 The Lord has flouted all my mighty men in the midst of me;  
He has proclaimed a date against me to crush my young men;  
In a winepress God has trampled maiden Judah.

16 For these things do I weep, tears stream from my eyes;  
Far from me is a comforter, reviving my spirit;  
My children are forlorn, for the enemy has prevailed.

17 Zion spreads her hands out, there is none to comfort her;  
The Lord summoned Jacob's enemies round about him;  
Jerusalem has become something unclean among them.

18 The Lord is in the right, for I did disobey him;  
Listen, all you peoples, look at my agony;  
My maidens and my youths have gone into captivity!

19 I called to my friends, but they deceived me;

רָמוֹנִי בְּהִנִּי וּקְנִי בְּעִיר גָּעוֹ כְּרַבְקָשׁוּ אֲכָל לִמּוֹ וְשִׁיבָּה  
אַתְּגַפְּשָׁם: רָאָה דְּבָרָה בְּצָרָלִי מֵעַי חַמְרָמָרוֹ נְהַפֵּךְ  
לְבָבְכָרְבִּי כִּי מַרְוּ מְגִיחִי מִתְּחִזְקָה שְׁבָלְהִיחָרֵב בְּבֵית  
בְּמֹותָה: שְׁמֹלָד כִּי נְאַנְחָה אַנְיָן מִנְתָּמָל לִי בְּלָאַיִלִי  
שְׁמַעַי רְעַתִּי שְׁתַׁוְכִּי אַפְּהָ עֲשִׂית הַבָּאָת יוֹסִיךְרָאָת וְדָדוֹ  
בְּמַנְיָה: תָּבָא בְּלָדְעַתָּם לְפָנָךְ וְיַוְלֵל לִמּוֹ כְּאַשְׁר עַלְלָה  
לְעַל בְּלָפְשָׁאֵי כְּרִבּוֹת אַנְחָה וְלַבִּי דָנוֹ:

ב

אַיְכָה יַעֲלֵב בְּאָפָוּ אַרְנִי אַתְּבָתִצְיָן הַשְּׁלַךְ מִשְׁלָמִים  
אָרֶץ חַפְּאָרָת: שְׁרָאֵל וְלֹאָזְבָּר הַרְבָּדְגָּלִיו בַּיּוֹם אָפָוּ:  
בְּלֹעַ אַרְנִי לֹא חַמֵּל אֶת בְּלָנָנוֹתָה יַעֲלֵב דָּרָס בְּעַבְרָתוֹ  
מִבְּצָרִי בְּתִיזְזָהָה הַגְּעֵץ לְאָרֶץ חַלְלָמְלָכָה וְשָׂרָהָה:  
גַּעַש בְּחַרְיָאִת בְּלִקְרָן יְשָׁרָאֵל הַשִּׁיבָּא אַחֲרָו יְמִינָו מִפְּנֵי  
אוֹיֵב וְיַבְעֵר בְּיַעֲלֵב בְּאָשׁ לְהַבָּה אֲכָלָה סְבִיבָו: דָּרָךְ  
קָשָׁתוֹ כְּאוֹיֵב נַצְבָּא יְמִינָו כְּצָר נִידְרָג בְּלָמְחַמְּדִיעָן בְּאַהֲלָל  
בְּתִצְיָן שְׁפָךְ בְּאָשׁ חַמְתָּה: הַהָּ אַרְנִי בְּאַיִל בְּלֹעַ  
יְשָׁרָאֵל בְּלֹעַ בְּלָאָרְמָנוֹתָה שְׁחִתָּמְבָצָרִיו וְרַב בְּבַתָּה  
יְדָזָה פָּתָנָה וְאָנָה: נִיחַמֵּס כְּנָנוֹ שְׁבָו שְׁחִתָּמְעָדוֹ שְׁבָח  
יְדָזָה בְּצִיּוֹן מִזְעֵד רְשָׁבָת וְיִגְאַז בְּנַעַס-אָפָו מֶלֶךְ וּכְהֵן:  
זָנָה אַרְנִי וּמִזְבְּחָו נָאָר מִקְדְּשָׁו הַסְּגִיר בְּזָרָאָיֵב חֹמָת  
אַרְמָנוֹתָה קַיְל נְתַעַ בְּבִתִּיזְזָה בַּיּוֹם מִזְעֵד: חַשְׁבָּה  
יְדָזָה לְהַשְׁחִית חֹמָת בְּתִצְיָן גַּטָּה קַו לְאַדְשִׁיבָּה דָּזָה.

קרוי: ולא.

The Greek version of the Bible, the Septuagint, begins the book of Lamentations with these words: "After Israel was carried into captivity, and Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremiah sat down and wept, and sang this song of woe over Jerusalem."

My priests and my elders have died of hunger in the city;  
They kept searching for food to keep themselves alive.

20 See, O Lord, how distressed I am; my stomach writhes;  
My heart turns within me, because I did disobey thee;  
Outside the sword makes orphans, inside brings death.

21 They have heard that I am sighing, but none comforts me;  
All my foes have heard of my calamity and rejoiced;  
Thou hast done it, thou hast brought the threatened day;  
O let them fare like me!

22 Let all their evil deeds come before thee;  
Do to them as thou hast done to me for all my sins;  
For my sighs are many and my heart is sick.

## II

1 How the Lord in his anger has set maiden Zion under a cloud !  
He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel;  
He did not remember his footstool in his day of anger.

2 The Lord has destroyed ruthlessly the homesteads of Jacob;  
In his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of Judah;  
He has deeply degraded the kingdom and its princes.

3 He has cut down in blazing anger all the force of Israel;  
He has withdrawn his right hand in the presence of the enemy;  
He has ravaged Jacob like flaming fire devouring all around.

4 Like a foe he has bent his bow, standing poised like an enemy;  
He has slain all that were a delight to the eye;  
In the tent of Zion he has poured out his wrath like fire.

5 The Lord has acted like an enemy, he has overwhelmed Israel;  
He has laid waste all its palaces, laid in ruins its strongholds;  
He has increased mourning and lamentation within Judah.

6 He stripped his shrine like a garden, demolished his temple;  
The Lord blotted out the memory of feast and sabbath Zion;  
In his fierce anger he has spurned king and priest alike.

7 The Lord has abandoned his altar, disdained his sanctuary;  
He delivered the walls of its mansions into the enemy's hand;  
They raised shouts in the Lord's house as on a festive day.

8 The Lord designed to destroy the wall of maiden Zion;  
He marked it off by the line, refrained not from causing ruin;  
He has made rampart and wall to mourn and languish.

מִבְלָע נִיאָבָלְתָל חֹמָה יְחִוּ אַמְלָלוֹ: פְּבָעָו בָּאָרֶץ  
 שְׁעִירָה אָבָד וְשָׁבָר בָּרִיחָה מִלְּפָה יְשִׁירָה בְּנוֹים אֵין  
 תּוֹרָה נְבִגְבִּיאָה לְאָמַצָּאוֹ חָזָן מִירָה: יְשָׁבוּ לְאָרֶץ  
 דָּמוֹ וְקַעַי בַּתְּצִיּוֹן הָעַלְוָה עַפְרָעַלְדָּאָשָׁם חָנָנוּ שְׁקָוִים  
 הָוָרִידָה לְאָרֶץ רָאשָׁן בְּתוֹלָת יְרוּשָׁלָם: כָּלּו בְּרוּמָוֹת  
 עַיִן חַמְרָמָנוּ מַלְיָי נְשָׁפָךְ לְאָרֶץ בְּבָדָי עַלְשָׁבָר בְּתָרָ  
 עַמְיָה בְּעַטְפָּה עַוְלָל יוֹנָק בְּרָחָבוֹת קְרִיה: לְאַמְתָּחָם יְאַמְתָּחָם  
 אַיָּה הָגָן בְּיוֹן בְּהַתְּעַטְּפָם כְּחַלְל בְּרָחָכוֹת עִיר בְּהַשְּׁתְּפָךְ  
 נְפָשָׁם אַלְדָּיְק אַמְתָּחָם: מְהָאָעָדָךְ מִהָּאָרְמָה-לְךְ הַבָּתָ  
 יְרוּשָׁלָם מִהָּאָשָׁוְה-לְךְ וְאַנְתָּמָךְ בְּתוֹלָת בַּתְּצִיּוֹן כִּיְדָרְלָ  
 כִּים שְׁבָהָךְ מַי יְרָפָאָלָךְ: נְבִיאָךְ חָזָן לְךְ שְׂוָא וְתָפָלָ  
 וְלְאָגָלָוּ עַל-עַזְונָךְ לְהַשִּׁיב שְׁבִיתָה וַיְתַזּוּ לְךְ מִשְׁאָוֹת שְׂוָא  
 וּמִדְּחוֹם: סְפָלוּ עַלְיךָ בְּפִים בְּלַעֲבָרִי דָּרָךְ שְׁרָכוּ נְיַעַשָּׁ  
 רָאשָׁם עַלְבָתָ יְרוּשָׁלָם הַזָּאת הַעִיר שְׁיָאָמָרָו בְּלִילָת יְמִיָּה  
 מִשּׁוֹש לְכָלְדָאָרֶץ: פְּצַוְוָעַלְיךָ פִּזְבָּטָם כְּלָאַיְבָךְ שְׁרָכוּ  
 נְתְּרָקִישׁוּ אַמְרָו בְּלָעָנוּ אָךְ וְהִיּוֹם שְׁקִינָהוּ מְעָנָן  
 רָאַינוּ: עָשָׂה יְהָה אָשָׂר זָמָם בְּצַע אַמְרָתוֹ אָשָׂר צָהָ  
 קְיִמְרִיקָם דָּרָם וְלֹא חִמְל וְיִשְׁמַח עַלְיךָ אֹיֵב הָרִים גַּעַן  
 אָרָךְ: צַעַק לְפָם אַלְאָרָן חֹמָת בַּתְּצִיּוֹן הָוָרִידִי בְּגַחְלָ  
 רַמְעָה יוֹמָם וְלִילָה אַלְחַתְנִי פּוֹנִית לְךְ אַלְתָּלִים בְּתָרָ  
 עַנְקָה: קוֹמִי וּרְנִי בְּלִילָה לְרָאש אַשְׁמָרוֹת שְׁפָכִי כְּפִלִּים  
 לְךְ נְכָח פָּנָן אַרְגָּן שָׁאָי אַלְיוֹ בְּפַזְק עַל-נְפָשׁ עַוְלָלָךְ  
 קָרֵי שְׁבּוּמָר. בְּלִילָה.

It has been said that this elegy, written with sighs and tears, has done its work most effectually in great public calamities, and is doing it every year on Tish'ah b'Av, when it is read in all the synagogues. It keeps alive the memory of the deepest Jewish humiliation and the hope of final deliverance.

- 9 Her gates have sunk to the ground, he has shattered her bars;  
Her king and her rulers are among the nations, no more Torah;  
Her very prophets receive no vision from the Lord.
- 10 They sit silent on the ground, the elders of maiden Zion;  
They cast dust on their heads and dressed in sackcloth;  
The girls of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.
- 11 My eyes are spent with tears, my inwards writhe in anguish;  
My heart is poured out in grief because of my people's ruin;  
When babes and sucklings languish in the streets of the city.
- 12 They cry to their mothers: "Where is bread and wine?"  
As they faint like wounded men in the street of the town;  
As their life is gasped out in their mothers' bosoms.
- 13 What can I say to you, to what can I compare you, Jerusalem?  
To what can I liken you to console you, maiden Zion?  
Your disaster is vast as the sea, who can heal you?
- 14 Your prophets envisioned for you falsehood and senselessness;  
They did not expose your iniquity to restore your fortunes;  
They prophesied to you false and deceptive messages.
- 15 All those who pass along the way clap their hands over you;  
They hiss and wag their heads at maiden Jerusalem:  
"Is this the city, called perfect in beauty, the joy of all  
the earth?"
- 16 All your enemies jeer at you, they hiss and grind their teeth;  
They say: "We have destroyed her! Ah, this is the day  
We have longed for; we have lived to see it!"
- 17 The Lord did what he planned, he carried out his threat  
He had ordained long ago, he demolished without pity;  
He let the enemy rejoice over you, and exalted your foes.
- 18 Their heart cried out to the Lord: O wall of maiden Zion,  
Let your tears run down like a torrent day and night!  
Give yourself no rest, let not your eyes cease to shed tears.
- 19 Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches!  
Pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord!

העטפם ברכב בראש כלחות: ראה זהה ובכיתה  
למי עילית בה אסחתא כלנה נשים פרום עלי טפחים  
אסידר במקצת אדע כן ונביא: שכבו לארכן החותת  
גער וקע בטלתי ובחורו נפלו בחרב דרנית ביום אפק  
טbatchת לא חמלת: תקרא ביום מועד מועד מסביב ולא  
הה ביום אפרידעה פליט ושגד אשרטפחת ורביתי  
אבי כולם:

אֵין גָּבֵר רָאָה עַנִּי בְּשִׁבְט עֲבָדָתוֹ אָוֹתִי נְגַד מִלְּךָ  
חַדְקָה וְלֹא אָדָר אָזְקָה כִּי יָשַׁב דָּפָךְ גַּזְוָן כְּלָדִים:  
בְּלָה בְּשָׁרִי וְעוֹרִי שְׁבָר עַצְמָותִי בְּנָה עַל בְּקָה רַאשָּׁת  
וְתָלָהָה בְּמַחְשָׁבִים דְּשִׁיבָּנוּ בְּמַתִּיעָן עַלְמָם: גַּדְרָה  
קְדָסָה וְלֹא אָצָא הַכְּבָד נְחַשְׁתִּי נְמַמְּנִי אָזָעַק וְאַשְׁׁעַזְעָזָעָז  
שְׁבָם תְּפָלָתוֹ גַּדְרָה דָּרְכִּי בְּנָוֹתִי נְתִיבָתִי עַדָּה: רַב  
אָרָב הַזָּא לְאָרָה בְּמַסְתָּרִים הַדָּרְכִּי סְוָרִי וְיַפְשָׁחָנִי  
שְׁמַעַי שְׁוֹמָס: דָּבָךְ קְשָׁתָו נְצִיבָנִי בְּמַטְרָא לְחַזִּי:  
הַבִּיא בְּבָלְתִּי בְּנִי אַשְׁפָּחוֹ: הַיְתִי שְׁתָקָן לְבָלְעָמָי  
נְגַעַתָּם כְּלָדִים: הַשְּׁבָעִינִי בְּמַרוֹרִים תְּרִינִי לְעֵנָה:  
מִבְּרַס כְּחַצֵּן שְׁזִי הַכְּפִישִׁי בְּאָפָר: וְתִזְנֵח מִשְׁלָוָם נְפַשֵּׁז  
נְשַׁתִּי תְּזַבָּה: וְאָמַר אָבָד נְצָד וְתִזְלַחֲתִי מִידָּה:  
וְבָרָצְעִי וְמַדְעָדָר לְעֵנָה וְרַאשָּׁה: וְבוֹר תְּנוּכָה וְתִשְׁחַת אַלְלָי  
גְּפַשָּׁס: זֹאת אַשְׁיָּב אַלְלָבִי עַלְבָּן אַחֲלִי: הַסְּעִי  
הַזָּה כִּי לְאַתְּמָת כִּי לְאַכְלָוּ חַמְיוֹ: חַדְשִׁים לְבָקָרִים

קְרִי אָרִי חַשְׁבָּן

The book of Lamentations is chanted to a melody of poignant beauty. The theme is a lament for the sufferings of the Jewish people during and after the destruction of Judea and Jerusalem by the Babylonian hordes of king Nebuchadnezzar.

Pray to him for the life of your infants,  
Who starve at every street corner.

20 Consider, O Lord, look! Whom have you treated like this!  
Are women to eat their children, the babes of their care?  
Should priest and prophet be slain in the Lords sanctuary?

21 Both young and old lie in the dust of the streets;  
My maidens and my youths have fallen by the sword;  
Thou hast slain them in thy anger, slaughtered without pity.

22 Thou didst invite, as to a festival, my neighbors round about.  
None survived or escaped on the day of the Lord's wrath.  
Those whom I nurtured and reared my enemy has destroyed.

## III

1 I am the man who suffered under the rod of his anger.

2 He has driven me on and on into darkness, without any light.

3 Over and again he turned his hand only against me all day.

4 He has worn away my flesh and skin, and broken my bones.

5 He has built all around me misery and tribulation.

6 He has made me dwell in darkness like men long dead.

7 He walls me in, I cannot get out; he loads me with chains.

8 Though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer.

9 He blocks my ways with hewn stones, he tangles up my paths.

10 He is a lurking bear to me, a lion in hiding.

11 He forced me off my way, mangled me and made me forlorn.

12 He has bent his bow and made me a target for his arrows.

13 He has driven his shafts home, right into my vitals.

14 I am the butt of all people, the subject of their jibes all day.

15 He has filled me with bitterness, sated me with wormwood.

16 He has broken my teeth with gravel, covered me with ashes.

17 My soul is bereft of peace, I have forgotten happiness.

18 I said: "My strength is lost, and my hope in the Lord."

19 O be mindful of my affliction and distress, bitterness and gall.

20 Remember, O remember, my being is bent down within me.

21 This I call to mind, and therefore I am hoping.

22 The steadfast kindness of the Lord and his mercy never end.

23 They are renewed every morning, great is thy faithfulness.

רְבָה אֲמִינָה: חַלְלֵי דָּזָה אָמָרָה נְפָשִׁי עַלְבֵן אֲוֹתָיל  
לוֹ: טָוב יְדָה לְקֹנוֹ לְנֶפֶשׁ תְּדָרְשָׁוֹ: טָוב וְחַילָּ  
דָּזָם לְתְשִׁיעָתָה זָהָה: טָוב לְגַבֵּר כִּידְשָׁא עַל בְּנָעָרָיו:  
יְשַׁב בְּדָל וַיָּסַם כִּי גַּטְלָל עַלְיוֹ: יְתַן בְּעֵפֶר פְּדוּאָוָלָי  
יְשַׁתְּקָה: יְתַן לְמַבָּחוֹ לְחַי יְשַׁבֵּעַ בְּחַרְפָּה: כִּי לֹא  
זָנָה לְעַלְמָם אֲרָנִי: כִּי אַסְמָדוֹה וְרַקֵּם בְּלֵב חַסְדָּוֹ: כִּי  
לֹא עַתָּה מַלְבּוֹ בְּנֵה בְּנֵרָאִישׁ: • לְדָכָא תְּחַת רַגְלָיו  
בְּלֹ אַסְרֵי אָרֵן: לְדָתוֹתָ מְשֻׁפְטָנָבָר נַעַד פָּנָעָלָיו:  
לְצַוְתָּ אָדָם בְּרִיבָו אֲרָנִי לֹא רָאָה: מַיְ וְהַ אַמְרָל  
וְתָהִוְ אֲרָנִי לֹא צָהָה: מַפִּי עַלְיוֹן לֹא תַצְאָה רַעֲשָׁוֹת וְתַטְוָבָה:  
מְהַדְתָּאָוָן אָדָם לְיַגְבָּר עַלְתָּהָטָאָן: נַשָּׂא לְבָבָנָאָל  
דְּרַכְבָּיו וְנַחֲלֹזָה וְנַשְׁׁוּבָה עַדְיָהָה: נַשָּׂא לְבָבָנָאָל  
בְּפֶפֶם אַלְאָל בְּשָׁמִים: נַחֲנוּ פְּשָׁעָנוּ וְמַרְעֵנוּ אַקְהָה לֹא  
סְלָחָתָה: סְכָוָתָה בָּאָרָה וְתַרְדְּפָנִי הַרְגָּתָה לֹא חִמָּלָתָה:  
סְבָתָה בְּעַזְנוֹ לְזָקָן מַעֲבָדָר תְּפָלָה: סְחָי וּמְאָוָס תְּשִׁמְמָנָה  
בְּקָרְבָּהָעָמִים: פָּצָא עַלְעַנִּים פְּרִים בְּלָאִיבָּנָה: פְּחָד  
וְפָרָתָה זָהָה לְעַשְׂתָה וְהַשְּׁבָרָה: פְּלִגְיָמִים תְּרֵד עַיִן  
עַלְשָׁבָר בְּתִיעָמִים: עַיִן נְגָרָה וְלֹא תְּרִמָּה מֵאַיִן  
הַפְּנוּתָה: עַדְיִשְׁקָוֹף וּלְרָא זָהָה מִשְׁמִים: עַיִן עַולְלָה  
לְנֶפֶשׁ מַבָּל בְּנוֹת עִירִי: צָוד צְרוּי בְּצַפּוֹר אַיִבָּי  
הַנָּס: צָמְטוּ בְּבּוֹר תְּשִׁי נְדֹרְאָכוֹ כִּי: צָפְרָמִים עַל-

קרִי: טְפָרִי. טְפָאָז.

Each of the five poems is complete in itself, forming a well-rounded whole. Though the five chapters contained in the book have the same theme, namely the destruction of Jerusalem, each of them dwells on a different phase of the subject. Four chapters (1, 2, 4, 5) have each twenty-two verses, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3, however, has sixty-six verses, three times twenty-two.

24 The Lord is my share, I say, therefore I will hope in him.  
25 The Lord is good to those who trust in him,  
To a soul that seeks him.  
26 It is good to wait in silence for the Lord's help.  
27 It is good for a man in his youth to bear a yoke.  
28 Let him sit alone and be silent when he has laid it upon him.  
29 Let him put his mouth to the dust, there may yet be hope.  
30 Let him offer his cheek to the smiter, and be filled with abuse.  
31 For the Lord does not reject forever.  
32 Though he causes grief, he has mercy in his rich kindness.  
33 He does not wilfully bring grief and affliction to mankind.  
34 To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth.  
35 To deny the right of a man in the presence of the Most High.  
36 To wrong a man in his cause—this the Lord does not approve.  
37 Who can form a thing when the Lord ordains it not?  
38 Are not weal and woe alike decreed by the Most High?  
39 Why should a man complain when punished for his sins?  
40 Let us search and examine our ways, let us return to the Lord.  
41 Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven.  
42 We transgressed and rebelled, thou hast not pardoned.  
43 In anger thou hast pursued us, slaying without pity.  
44 Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that no prayer may  
pass through.  
45 Thou hast made us scum and refuse among the peoples.  
46 All our enemies have opened their mouth railing against us.  
47 Panic and pitfall are our lot, ravage and ruin.  
48 My eyes shed streams of tears for the disaster of my people.  
49 My eyes shall flow without cease, without respite.  
50 Until the Lord looks down and beholds from heaven.  
51 My eyes are sore because of all the maidens of my town.  
52 My foes have snared me like a bird without cause.  
53 They have cut off my life in a dungeon, and cast stones at me.  
54 Waters flowed over my head, I said: "I am lost."

רָאשִׁי אָמַרְתִּי נָגַרְתִּי: קָרָאַתִּי שָׁמֶךְ יְהוָה מָפֹר  
תְּחִתּוֹתָה: כָּוֹל שְׁמַעַת אֶל-תְּעָלָם אָנוֹךְ לְרִיחָתִי לְשֹׁועָתִי:  
קָרְבָּת בָּיּוֹם אֲקָרָאָךְ אָמְרָת אל-תִּירָא: כְּבֵת אַדְנִי  
רַיְבִּי נֶפֶשׁ נָאָלָת חַיִּי: רָאַתָּה יְהוָה עֲוֹתָתִי שְׁפָטָה  
מְשִׁפְטָה: רָאַתָּה בְּלִינְקָמָתָם בְּלִמְחַשְּׁבָתָם לִי:

שְׁמַעַת תְּרַפְתָּם יְהוָה בְּלִמְחַשְּׁבָתָם עַלִי: שְׁפָטָה קָמָי  
הַגְּזִוָּם עַלִי בְּלִדְיוֹם: שְׁבָתָם וְקִוְמָתָם הַבִּטָּה אָנִי  
מְגִינָתָם: תְּשִׁיבָה לָהֶם גָּמָול יְהוָה בְּמַעַשָּׂה יְהִזְקָם:  
תְּפַנוּ לָהֶם מְגִנָתִילָב תְּאַלְתָּךְ לָהֶם: תְּרַלֵּפָבְאָפָוּתְשִׁמְלָם  
מִתְהַת שְׁמֵי דָנָה:

## ד

אַכְּהֵי יְעַם וְרֵב יְשָׁנָא הַכְּתָם הַטּוֹב תְּשַׂתְפְּכָנָה אַבְגָּי  
לְרַדְשׁ בַּרְאָשׁ בְּלִדְזָוֹתָה: בְּנֵי צִיּוֹן תְּוֹקְרִים הַמְּסֻלָּאִים  
בְּפָנוֹ אַיִּהֵנָה נְחַשְּׁבָו לְנַבְלִיחָרֵשׁ מַעַשָּׂה דָנִי יְצָרָה: נְמַדְּבָר  
תְּגַנֵּן תְּלַצֵּי שֶׁד הַיְנִיקָוּ טְרִיטָן בְּתַעַמִּי לְאַכְּזָר בֵּין עַנִּים  
בְּמַרְבָּר: דְּבָקָ לְשֹׁן יְינָק אַלְחָבָו בְּצָמָא עַוְלָלִים שְׁאָלוּ  
לָהֶם פְּרִישׁ אָז לָהֶם: דְּאָכְלִים לְמַעְדָּנִים נְשָׁמוּ בְּחַרְצָוֹת  
הַאֲמָנִים עַל תּוֹלֵעַ חַבְקָנוּ אַשְׁפָּחוֹת: וַיַּגְדֵּל עַזְנֵן בְּתַעַמִּי  
מְהֻתָּאת סָרָם הַהֲפֹכָה כְּמַרְגָּעָן וְלְאַחֲלָו בָּהּ דִּים:  
וַיְבִּזְרַדְתָּה מִשְׁלָגָן צָחַז מְחַלָּב אֲדָמוֹ עַצְמָם מִפְנִינִים סְפִיר  
גָּוֹרָתָם: חַשְׁךְ מְשֻׁחָרְתָּאָרָם לֹא נְכַרְתָּו בְּחַזְוֹתָא צָפָר  
עוֹרָם עַל-עַצְמָם יָבֹשׁ הָעָה בָעֵץ: טַוְבִּים דָיוֹ חַלְלִיחָרֵב

קרוי: פָּנִים. בְּיֻעָם.

The first chapter emphasizes the desolation and misery of Jerusalem, describing it as a widow, and as a tributary, that is: Judah has lost her independence, and there is none to comfort her. The ever-recurring themes are the abandonment of the city by her allies, the distress of her inhabitants,

55 I called on thy name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit.  
 56 Thou didst hear my plea: Do not close thy ear to my cry.  
 57 When I called thee, thou didst come near,  
     Thou didst say: "Do not fear."  
 58 Thou didst champion my cause, thou didst redeem my life.  
 59 Thou didst see, O Lord, my wrongs; judge thou my cause.  
 60 Thou hast seen all their revenge, all their designs against me.  
 61 Thou hast heard their taunts, O Lord, all their plots against me.  
 62 The lips and thoughts of my foes are against me all day long.  
 63 Look, whether they sit or stand, I am the butt of their taunts.  
 64 Requite them, O Lord, for what they have done.  
 65 Give them anguish of heart, thy curse be upon them.  
 66 Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under thy heaven.

## IV

1 How the gold is dimmed, how tarnished the finest gold!  
     The sacred gems are scattered over every street corner.  
 2 The precious children of Zion, worth their weight in gold,  
     Count no more than crockery, work of a potter's hands!  
 3 Even jackels give the breast and suckle their young,  
     But my people has turned cruel like ostriches of the desert.  
 4 The tongue of the nursling cleaves to the palate for thirst;  
     Little children beg for bread, and none gives it to them.  
 5 Those who feasted on dainties perish in the streets;  
     Those who were reared in purple embrace refuse heaps.  
 6 The punishment of my people exceeds that of Sodom,  
     Which was overthrown in a moment, without a hand striking it.  
 7 Her crowned princes were purer than snow, whiter than milk,  
     They were redder than rubies, their bodies resembled sapphire.  
 8 They are blacker than soot;  
     They are not recognized in the streets;  
     Their skin shriveled on their bones, it became dry as wood.  
 9 Better off were those who died by the sword,

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the pride of the enemy. "My friends" (1:19) refers to Zion's foreign allies who failed to help her, as the prophets had warned. In 1:22, Zion fully

מחלל רעב שעם זוכּוּ מדקרים מטעבות שדי: דָּבָר  
נשְׂםָ רְחַמְנִית בְּשָׁלוּ וְלִדְתָּן רְיוּ לְבָרוֹת לְמוּ בְשָׁבָר  
בַּתְּצִמְחִי: בְּלָה דָּה אַתְּדַמְתָּו שְׁפָךְ תְּרֵחָ אַפְּוּ וְאַתְּ  
אַשְׁ בְּצִחְוּ וְתַאֲכֵל יְסֻתָּה: לֹא הָאָמַע מִלְכִירָאַרְץ וְלֹל  
וְשָׁבֵי חַבֵּל כִּי יָבָא צָר וְאַזְבֵּב שָׁעֵרִי וְרַשְׁלָם: מִתְּחַפְּאָת  
נְבִיאָה שָׂנָת בְּרִגְגָה הַשְּׁפָכִים בְּקַרְבָּה וְסָם אַדְיִקִים: נְשָׂעָ  
עֲדִים בְּחַצְנָת נְנַאֲלוּ בְּדָם בְּלָא יְכָלָה יְגַעַּ בְּלְבָשָׁתָם:  
סְרוּחָ טְמֵא קְרָא לְמוּ סְרוּחָ סְרוּחָ אַלְהָגָנִי כִּי נְשָׂעָ נְבָיָ  
נְשָׂעָ אָמַרְדָּ בְּנָיָם לֹא יְסַפֵּר לְנָורָה: פְּנֵי דָּהָה חַלְקָם לֹא  
יְסַפֵּר לְהַבְּיָטָם פְּנֵי קְבָּגִים לֹא נְשָׂא אַמְגָנִים לֹא חַגְנִים:  
עֲדִינָה תְּכָלֵנָה עַיְינָה אַלְעַרְתָּנָה הַבָּל בְּצַפְתָּנָה צַפְתָּנָה  
אַלְעַזְיָה לֹא יוֹשָׁע: צָדוּ אַצְדִּיעַ מֶלֶכֶת בְּרַחְבָּתָנָה קְרָבָ  
קְאָצָע מְלָאוּ יְמִיעָה כְּרָבָא קְאָצָע: קְלִים הַיּוּ רְדָפִיעַ מְגַשְּׁרִ  
שְׁמָים עַלְהָרָרִים דְּלָקָטָם בְּמַדְבָּר אַרְבָּטָלָע: רְחֵחָ אַפְּיָעָ  
מְשִׁיחָה דָּהָה נְלַבֵּךְ בְּשְׁחוֹתָתָם אֲשֶׁר אַמְרָע בְּצָלָל נְחָה  
בְּנָיָם: שְׁעַשְׂיָה וְשְׁמָדוֹת בְּתָאָרוֹם יְצַבְתָּה בָּאָרֶץ עַזְיָ  
בְּמַעְלָה תְּעַבְּרָתָם תְּשִׁבְרִי וְתְּתִעְרִי: תְּמַעֲזָנָה בְּתָרָ  
צִיָּה לֹא יְסַפֵּר לְגַלְוָתָךְ פְּרָךְ שְׁעַנְךְ בְּתָאָרוֹם גַּלְהָ עַל  
הַטָּאָתָךְ:

## ה

וְכָרְדָּה מְהַדְּהָה לְנוּ דְּבִיקְתָּן וְרָאָה אַתְּדַרְפָּתָנָה:  
נְחַלְתָּנָה נְהַפְּכָה לְרוּם בְּפַעַט לְנִכְרִים: יְתּוֹמָם הַיּוּ

קרי: כל. זוקט. טְרִיט. יְצָקָת. הַבִּיאָה.

acknowledges her guilt; nevertheless, she pleads that her enemies and oppressors also be punished for their guilt.

In the second chapter, the agonies of the siege, the despair of the citizens, the terrible scenes due to famine are depicted realistically. The sin of Jerusa-

Than those who died of hunger;  
They were stabbed for want of the products of the fields.

10 The hands of tender women have boiled their children;  
Such became their food amid the disaster of my people.

11 The Lord gave full vent to his wrath, poured out his hot anger;  
He lit a fire in Zion which consumed its foundations.

12 The kings cou'd not believe, nor any of the world's dwellers,  
That foe or enemy could ever enter the gates of Jerusalem.

13 It was for the sins of her prophets, the iniquities of her priests,  
Who had shed in her midst the blood of the just.

14 They wandered blindly through the streets, stained with blood,  
So that no men were able to touch their garments.

15 "Begone! Unclean!" people shouted at them;  
Begone, begone, do not touch, for they are fugitives;  
It was said: among the nations they stay shall never more.

16 The Lord himself scattered them, caring nothing for them;  
No honor was shown to the priests, no favor to the elders.

17 Our eyes are still failing, ever watching vainly for help;  
We are watching for a nation that cannot help.

18 Foes dogged our steps so that we could not walk in our streets;  
Our doom is near, our days are over, our end has come.

19 Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles in the sky;  
They chased us in the hills, ambushed us in the desert.

20 Our breath of life, the Lord's anointed was trapped  
in their pits.  
We had thought we might live among the nations,  
under his shadow.

21 Rejoice and be glad, Edom, inhabiting the land of Uz;  
The cup will reach you too; you shall be drunk and exposed.

22 Your guilt, maiden Zion, is over; he will exile you never again;  
Your iniquity, Edom, he will punish; he will uncover your sins.

## V

1 Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; behold our disgrace.  
2 Our heritage has passed to strangers, our homes to aliens.

אֵין אֶבֶן אַמְתָּיו בְּאַלְמָנוֹת: מִימְלָטוּ בְּכַסְף שְׁתִינוּ עַצְמֵינוּ  
בְּמַחְרֵךְ יָבֹאוּ: עַל צְוִיאָרֵנוּ נַדְּבָפְנוּ יִגְּעָנוּ לֹא דָוִיחָלָנוּ:  
מַצְרִים נַעֲטָנוּ דַּד אֲשֹׁור לְשָׁבָע לְהָם: אַבְתָּנוּ חַטָּאוּ  
אַיִלָּם: אַנְחָנוּ עַוְתָּה תְּדִים קְבָלָנוּ: עַבְדִּים מַשְׁלָלוּ בַּעַפְקָן  
אַיִלָּם: בְּנַפְשָׁנוּ נַכְּיָא לְחַמְּנוּ מִפְנֵי חַרְבָּה דְּמַדְּבָרָה:  
עוֹרָנוּ בְּתַעוֹרָנָנוּ מִפְנֵי זְלִעְפּוֹת רְעָבָה: נְשִׁים בְּצִוְּנָה  
עַש בְּתַלְתָּה בְּעַרְיָה דְּזָוָה: שְׁרִים בְּיָמָם נַחֲלוּ פְּעַז וְקָנִים  
לֹא נַהֲרָרוּ: בְּחוּרִים טְהָרָן נְשָׂא וְגַעֲרִים בְּעַז קְשָׁלוּ:  
וְקָנִים מַשְׁעָר שְׁבָתוּ בְּחוּרִים מַגְנִינִתָּם: שְׁבָת מַשְׁוִישָׁ  
לְבָנָנוּ נַהֲפֵךְ לְאַבְלָל מְרוֹלָנוּ: נַפְלָה עַטְרָת רָאשָׁנוּ אָוֹרָ  
נָא לְנוּ בַּי חַטָּאוּנוּ: עַל-זָה דְּהָה לְבָנָנוּ עַל-אַלָּה חַשְׁבָּנוּ  
עַיְנָנוּ: עַל תְּרִצְיָוָן שְׁשָׁפָם שְׁוֹעָלִים הַלְּכָרְבָּה: אַתָּה  
דְּהָה לְעוֹלָם תְּשִׁבְכָּה לְדוֹר דְּרוֹר: לִמְהָה לְנִצְחָה  
תְּשִׁבְחָנוּ פְּעֻבָּנוּ לְאַדְךָ יְמִים: הַשִּׁבְנָנוּ דְּהָה אַלְלָדָ  
וְנַשְׁׁוֹבָן חַדְשָׁ יְמִינָנוּ בְּקָרְדָּם: בַּי אַסְמָאָס מַאֲסָפָה קְצָפָה  
עַלְיָנוּ עַד-מָאָרָה:

הַשִּׁבְנָנוּ דְּהָה אַלְלָד וְנַשְׁׁוֹבָן חַדְשָׁ יְמִינָנוּ בְּקָרְדָּם:

קרוי: ואן. ויל. ואקם. נאנחט. ווישקה.

lem, especially of her false prophets, is held up to view. The unity of the book of Lamentations is said to be found in its attitude toward suffering. It proclaims that suffering is the inevitable result of persistent sin. The people are urged to turn to God in supplication, so that he will turn and be gracious to them. In 2:20, where the inhuman condition of cannibalism is mentioned as a result of extreme famine in a besieged city, one may recall the description in II Kings (6, 26-29), where we read: "This woman said to me: Let us have your boy to eat today and tomorrow we will eat your boy..."

3 We have become fatherless; our mothers are like widows.  
 4 We buy our water we drink, our wood we get at a price.  
 5 We are pursued with a yoke on our neck, we toil and get no rest.  
 6 We hold out a hand to Egypt, to Assyria, to get enough bread.  
 7 Our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their guilt.  
 8 Slaves now lord it over us, with none to rescue us.  
 9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives,  
     Because of the sword in the wilderness.  
 10 Our skin glows like an oven, with the fever heat of famine.  
 11 Women were ravished in Zion, maidens in the towns of Judah.  
 12 Princes hanged by them, no respect was shown to elders.  
 13 Young men must carry millstones,  
     Youths stagger with loads of wood.  
 14 Elders have quit the city gate, the young men their music.  
 15 The joy of our hearts has ceased,  
     Our dancing is turned to mourning.  
 16 The crown has fallen from our head;  
     Woe to us, for we have sinned!  
 17 Because of this our heart is sick, our eyes have grown dim.  
 18 For Mount Zion, which lies desolate, jackals roam over it.  
 19 But thou, O Lord, art enthroned forever,  
     Thy throne endures through the ages.  
 20 Why dost thou quite forget us, forsaking us so long?  
 21 Restore us to thyself, O Lord, let us return;  
     Renew our days as of old.  
 22 Unless thou hast utterly rejected us,  
     Being exceedingly angry with us.

Restore us to thyself, O Lord, let us return;  
 Renew our days as of old.

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The third chapter is the most elaborate in structure and the most sublime in thought of all. It is but little longer than the other chapters of the book, even though it consists of sixty-six verses, three consecutive verses being built upon each letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

Chapter four closely resembles in structure chapter three. There are two main divisions, containing a description of the sufferings occasioned by famine and the punishment of priests and prophets, king and courtiers.

The fifth and final chapter is a meditation, with no trace of vindictiveness. It is not an alphabetic acrostic, even though it is divided into twenty-two verses. After the last verse, it is customary to repeat the preceding verse, being considered one of good omen.

## קָהָלָת

א

דְּבָרִי קָהָלָת בָּקָדָד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלָם: הַבָּל בְּבָלִים  
אָמַר קָהָלָת בָּבָל בְּבָלִים הַבָּל הַבָּל: מְהִירָהָן לְאַרְם  
בְּבָלְעָמָל שְׁעַמְלָל תְּחַת הַשְּׁמָשׁ: הַוָּר הַלְּךָ הַוָּר בָּא  
תְּאַרְץ לְעוֹלָם עַמְּדָת: וְתָרֵחַ הַשְּׁמָשׁ וּבָא הַשְּׁמָשׁ וְאַל  
מְקוּמוֹ שְׁוֹאָפָּה וְוֹתָחַת הַוָּא שָׁם: הַוָּלָךְ אַלְכָדָרָם וִסְׁוּבָּב  
אַלְכָפָּחָן סְׁוּבָּב וִסְׁבָּב הַוָּלָךְ הַרְחָחָה וְעַלְסְׁבִּיבָּחָיו שְׁבָּב  
הַרְחָחָה: בְּלִדְנָהָלִים הַלְּכִים אַלְהָוָם וְתָיָם אַיְנָעָה מְלָאָה  
אַלְמָלָקָם שְׁהַחָלִים הַלְּכִים שָׁם רַם שְׁבָּבָם לְלָכָת: בְּלִ  
הַדְּבָרִים יִגְעִים לְאַזְכָּל אִישׁ לְדִבָּר לְאַחֲשָׁבָעָה עַזָּן  
לְרָאֹות וְלְאַתְּמָלָא אַזְנָן מְשָׁמָעָה: מְהַשְּׁהָהָה הוּא שִׁידָה  
וּמְהַשְּׁנִיעָשָׂה הוּא שִׁיעָשָׂה וְאַזְנָבָנָשׁ תְּחַת הַשְּׁמָשׁ:  
יְשָׁדֵךְ שִׁיאָמֵר רְאַהֲךָ חַרְשָׁתָה תְּוָא בְּכָרָה הָהָה לְעַלְמִים  
אֲשֶׁר הָהָה מְלֵפְנֵינוּ: אַזְנָבָנָשׁ וּבְרָזָן לְרִאשָׁנִים וּגְמָן לְאַחֲרִינִים  
שְׁזָהָזָה לְאַדְהָה לְהָמָן וּבְרָזָן עַם שְׁזָהָזָה לְאַחֲרָהָה:

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The book of Koheleth has been described as one of the most charming books of antiquity. This noble and profoundly modern book should be read

## KOHELETH

### I

The words of Koheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Vanity of vanities, says Koheleth, utterly vain, everything is vain. What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? One generation passes and another generation comes, while the world stays on forever. The sun rises, and the sun goes down, then it strives on to its place to rise again. The wind blows toward the south, then it turns toward the north; round and round goes the wind, turning and returning on its track. All the streams flow to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they keep flowing again. All things are weary beyond man's description; the eye is never satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.

What has been is what will be; what has been done is what will be done; nothing is new under the sun. One may say of something: "See, this is new!" It has already been in the ages before us. Those of old are not remembered, nor will the recent be remembered by those who come after them.

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by all men carefully every day. It seemingly consists of contradictory theses concerning the highest problems of ethics, and is unique in the whole range of biblical literature. Identified with King Solomon, it contains twelve chapters of observations and maxims on the purpose of life. There is nothing grander than its survey of pain and pleasure, failure and success; no poem works more indomitably for spiritual illumination.

The Greek title of the book, *Ecclesiastes*, is a translation of the Hebrew name *Koheleth*, denoting perhaps one who convenes and addresses an assembly (*kahal*). However, the book does not consist of public speeches, but is a treatise on the theory that history and nature move in a circle. Similar views were held by ancient philosophers. Marcus Aurelius wrote: "They that come

אנן קהילת היעמי מלך על-ישראל בירושלם: ונתני  
את-לבבי לדרוש ולחזור בחייבת על כל-אשר נעשה תחת  
השמיים דזא ענין רע נתן אליהם לבני הארץ לעונות  
בו: ראהתי את-כל-המעשים שנעשה תחת השם והנה  
הכל הבעל ורעות רוח: מיעוט לא-יכול לתקון חסרון  
לא- יכול להמנות: דברתני אני עט-לבבי לא-אמר אני הנה  
הנחלתי והוספתי חכמה על כל-אשר-הזה לפני על  
ירושלם ולבי ראה הרבה חכמה ורעות: ואתנה לבי  
לברעת חכמה ורעות הלוות ושכליות דרעת שנסירה הוא  
רצין רוח: כי בראב חכמה רב-כגעים וויסוף געת יוסוף  
מקאוב:

## ב

אמרתני אני בלבבי לך-זא אנסכה בשמה וראה בטוב  
והנה נם-זו קבל: לשוחק אמרתני מה-זיל ולשםה  
מה-זיה עשה: פרתני בלבבי למשוך בין את-בשרא ולבי  
נתג בחכמה ולא-זו בסכלות עד אשר אראה איז-זת  
טוב לבני הארץ אשר יעשה תחת השמיים מספר ימי  
תיהם: הנחלתי מעשי בנותי ליבטים נטעתי לברמים:  
עשיתי ליל גנות ופרדסים ונטעתי בהם עץ כל-פרי:

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after us will see nothing new, and they who went before us saw nothing more than we have seen." This is reminiscent of the expression that there is nothing new under the sun (אך כל חדש תחת השם). According to some, science cannot discover anything really new; it only elaborates thoughts which are age-old possessions of mankind.

I, Koheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to seek and search out thoughtfully all that is done under heaven: it is a bleak task that God has allotted to human beings to be engrossed in. I have seen all things that are done under the sun: it is all vain and futile. What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be numbered.

I said to myself: "I have acquired great wisdom, more than anyone who preceded me over Jerusalem; my mind has broad experience of wisdom and knowledge. I have applied my mind to knowledge and wisdom as well as to mad folly. I know now that both are futile. The more wisdom, the more suffering; the more one knows, the more one aches."

## II

I said to myself: "Come now, let me try you with pleasure and have a good time!" But this too turned out to be of no use. Merrymaking, I decided, is madness; as for pleasure, what does it accomplish? I searched in my mind how to pamper my body with wine while my reason pursued wisdom, to lay hold on folly so as to see what is best for men to do beneath the sky during the brief span of their lives. I undertook great works, I built myself houses, I planted vineyards, I made for myself gardens and parks and planted in them trees bearing all sorts of fruit. I constructed

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The twelve chapters of Koheleth may be briefly outlined as follows: vanity of earthly things; vanity of wisdom; vanity of pleasure; wisdom and folly compared; vanity of toil; the unchanging order of events; the uncertainty of the future; social disorder; reverence for God; perverted justice; vanity of riches; vanity of desires; wisdom and folly contrasted; the world an enigma; women; obedience to rulers; the same lot for all; the uncertainty of fortune; proverbs; youth; old age; epilogue. Following are several ideas of Koheleth:

The life of man is short, saddened by the monotonous repetition which surrounds him. In order to obtain relief, various methods may be tried, the noblest of which is the pursuit of wisdom. Man's insight into the divine plan

אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁאַל בְּרָכֹת מֵיט לְהַשְׁקֹות מִלְּמָם וְעַד צָומָח עַצִּים:  
 קָנִיתָ עֲבָדִים וְשָׁפְחוֹת וּבְגִירְבָּת תְּזֵה לְגַם מִקְנָה בְּלָרָה  
 וְזֹאנוּ דָּרְבָּה דָּהָה לְיִמְבָּל שָׁהָן לְפָנֵי בִּירוּשָׁלָם: גַּנְסָתִי  
 לְיַלְּנָם בְּסָפִי וּוֹדָב וּסְגָלָת מְלָכִים הַמְּדִינָות עַשְׂיָתִי לְיַלְּנָם  
 שָׁרִים וּשְׁרוֹת וְתַעֲנָנוֹת בְּנֵי הָאָדָם שָׁהָה וְשָׁדָות: וּגְרָלָתִי  
 דַּוְסָפָתִי מִמְּבָל שָׁהָה לְפָנֵי בִּירוּשָׁלָם אֲפִי חַכְמָתִי עַמְּדָה  
 לְיַלְּנָם: וּכְלָא אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְנוּ עַיִן לְאַא אֲצָלָתִי מִתְּמָם לְאַא מִנְעָתִי  
 אֲתִ-לְבִּי מִכְלָשָׁמָה כִּי-לְבִּי שָׁמָה מִכְלָעָמָל וְהַדָּהָה  
 חַלְקִי מִכְלָל-עַמְּלִי: וּפְנִיתִי אַנְיִ בְּכָל-מִיעָשִׁי שָׁעָשָׁו יָדִי  
 וּבְעַמְּל שְׁעַמְּלָתוֹ לְעַשְׁוֹת הַנְּהָה הַכָּל הַבָּל וְרַעֲוָת רַחַת  
 וְאַזְן יְתַרְזֵן פָּחַת הַשְּׁמָשָׁה: וּפְנִיתִי אַנְיִ לְרַאֲוֹת חַכְמָה  
 וּדְוַלְלָות וּסְכָלוֹת כִּי אַמְּה הָאָדָם שִׁבְאָ אַחֲרֵי הַמְּלָךְ  
 אֲתִ אֲשֶׁר-כָּבֵר עַשְׂהָהוּ: וּרְאִיתִי אַנְיִ שִׁישִׁ יְתַרְזֵן לְחַכְמָה  
 מִזְדְּסָכָלָות כִּי-תַרְזֵן דָּאֹור מִזְתְּחָשֵׁךְ: הַחַבָּס עַיִינִי בְּרָאָשׁוֹ  
 הַבְּסִיל בְּתַרְשֵׁךְ הַזְּלָקָד וַיְתַעַטֵּי נִמְאָנִי שְׁמַלְתָּה אֶחָד יְגָדָה  
 אֲתִ-בְּלָם: וְאָמְרָתִי אַנְיִ בְּלָבִּי בְּמִקְרָה הַבְּסִיל נִמְ- אַנְיִ  
 יְקָרְבֵּי וְלֹפֶתְּ דְּבָרִתִי אַנְיִ אָוּ יְתַר וְדְבָרִתִי בְּלָבִּי שְׁגָם-עַה  
 הַבָּל: כִּי אַזְן וּבְרִזֵּן לְחַבָּס עַס-הַכְּסִיל לְעַולָּם בְּשָׁבָר

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of the universe is extremely limited. Longevity only increases human suffering. Greed is unsatisfying and futile. The best course is to alternate toil with enjoyment, to use what we have and accept the limitations. The wise and the rich, as well as the strong, are mere puppets of chance. The talk of fools is wordy and wearisome.

Koheleth conducted on himself a variety of experiments in living, noted their results and concluded: All is vain and meaningless. Riches and pleasure

reservoirs to irrigate the plantation of young trees. I bought slaves and slave girls, in addition to the servants I had within my household; I possessed also large herds and flocks, more than any men who preceded me in Jerusalem. I amassed also silver and gold, treasure owned by kings and states. I provided myself with male and female singers, with all human luxuries, and with many a mistress. I became great and exceeded all my predecessors in Jerusalem; also my wisdom stayed with me. I denied my eyes nothing they desired to see; I did not deprive my heart of any joy. Indeed, my heart drew pleasure from all my activities, and this was my share resulting from all my efforts. But when I turned around to consider all the works that I had accomplished, and the energy I had expended in doing them, it was clear that all of it was vanity and futility. There is nothing gained under the sun.

Then I turned to look at wisdom, foolishness and ignorance. Indeed, what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. I had an idea that wisdom excels ignorance as light excels darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the ignorant man walks in darkness. But then I realized that one lot befalls all men, I said to myself: "I shall meet the same fate as the ignorant; why then should I have attained more wisdom?" So I concluded in my mind that this too is futility. Indeed, there is no lasting memory either of the wise or the ignorant; in days to come both will have been forgotten. How is

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do not avail; existence is monotonous; enjoyment is a fleeting experience. Life's riddle is beyond human ability to solve. Wealth does not yield happiness; at death, it is left to people who have not toiled to acquire it.

Koheleth recommends patience, endurance and discretion. He examines the value of wisdom, wealth and pleasure, counseling wholesome work combined with reasonable pleasures, since there is no telling when the end comes.

Differing considerably in language and style from the other books of the Hebrew Bible, Koheleth is composed of vivid utterances concerning the

הימים הבאים הפל נשכה ואיך ימאות החכם עםchapTEL  
 ושנאותו אתה ותמים כי רע עלי הצעירה שנעשה תחת  
 המשמש בירחבל הצל ורעות רוח: ושנאותי אנו אתבל  
 עמל שעני עמל תחת המשמש שאנו לאדם שירח  
 אחריו: ומי יוציא החכם דינה או סבל וישלט בצל:  
 עמל שיעמלתי ושהכמתו תחת המשמש נס-זה הצל:  
 וסבותי אנו ליאש אתלב על כל-העמל שיעמלתי תחת  
 המשמש: כי-יש אדם שעמל בחקמה ובכערת ובכשרון  
 ולאדם שלא עמל-בו והנש חילקו נס-זה הצל ורעה  
 רביה: כי מהידזה לאדם בצל-עמל וברעון לבו שרווא  
 עמל תחת המשמש: כי כל-ימיו מכואבים וכעט עניין  
 נס-בלילה לא-שכוב לבו נס-זה הצל הוא: אין-נוב  
 באדם שיأكل ושותה ודראה אתיינשו טוב בעמל נס-  
 זה ראיתי אנו כי מזך האלים קיא: כי מז-יאכל ומי  
 יוציא הרין מפני: כי לאדם שטוב לפניו נתן חכמה ודעota  
 ושםחה ולחוטא נתן עניין לאקף ולכנום לחתת לטיב  
 לפניו האלים נס-זה הצל ורעות רוח:

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pursuit of wisdom, pleasure, wealth, labor; and refers to the plight of the oppressed and the lonely, the despotism in government and the infirmities of old age.

The phrase **חתה השמש** (under the sun), expressing the earthly scene of human activities and events, is found twenty-nine times in Koheleth. It is a variant of **חתה השמים** (under the heaven), which occurs three times in the book (1:13; 2:3; 3:1).

The phrase **רעות רוח**, in the sense of fruitless chasing the wind, occurs seven times in Koheleth. To reach a desirable goal is, in the opinion of

it, the wise man dies as well as the fool! So I came to hate life, because the work that is done under the sun displeased me; all is vanity and futility.

I came to detest all that I had toiled for under the sun, which I must leave to the man who is to come after me. Who knows whether he will be wise or ignorant? Yet he will have control over all the fruits of my toil and wisdom under the sun. This too is futility. So once again I turned to despair about all my efforts under the sun. Here is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and he must hand over what he possesses to a person who has not worked for it. This too is futility, and a great evil. For, what good does a man get out of all his toil and stress of heart with which he labors under the sun? He spends all his days in pains and grief; his mind is not at rest even at night. This too is futility.

There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and enjoy himself in his work. Even this, I realized, is from the hand of God. For, apart from me, who should eat, who should enjoy? Indeed, to a man who pleases him God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to leave it to the man who pleases God. This also is futility and a striving after wind.

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Koheleth, as hopeless as catching the wind; it is elusive to the grasp as air itself. Newton spoke of himself as a child picking up a few pebbles on the shore of the wide sea of knowledge. The more the veil is lifted, the wider is seen the extent of what is still unknown.

The word *hevel*, in the sense of mere breath or vanity, occurs thirty eight times in the book of Koheleth, stressing the idea that all things in life are transitory. Events strike us as new because previous generations have been swept into oblivion. Rarely do the memories of famous men survive them, indeed.

The world is full of trouble; the weak are oppressed by the strong. What we gain by toil is marred by the hostility of the less fortunate. The toil of the avaricious is insatiable, even when he has none to share his wealth or to succeed him. Even though a man may rise from the lowest to the highest station by wisdom, there is no permanence.

## לכל ומן ועת לאלהפין מחת השמים:

ועת למות	עת לדידת
ועת לעקור נטען :	עת לטעת
ועת לרפואה	עת להרוג
ועת לבנות	עת לפרק
ועת לשחוק	עת לבכורות
ועת רകד :	עת ספוד
ועת בנים אבנים	עת להשליך אבנים
ועת לרחיק מתחוק :	עת לחבוק
ועת לאבר	עת לבקש
ועת להשליך	עת לשמר
ועת לחרופ	עת לקרוע
ועת לרבר	עת לחשות
ועת לשנאה	עת לאhab
ועת שלום :	עת מלחמה
מהזחרון העישה באשר הוא عمل: ראייתו אתחזען	
אשר נתן אליהם לבני הארץ לעניות בם: אתחזקל	
עשה יפה בינו נם אתחזעלם נתן בלבם מגלי אשר	

Excess in words shows a person's foolishness. Though vows are not essential, they are binding once they are made. Avarice is never content. The wise and the ignorant, the rich and the poor find imperfect satisfaction in life.

A man's life cannot be considered happy before its end is reached. Wisdom and money are both valuable, but wisdom is the better of the two. Wisdom is

## III

Everything has its season; there is a time for every matter under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to uproot what has been planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
A time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
A time to lament, and a time to dance;  
A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather stones;  
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to seek, and a time to lose;  
A time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
A time to rend, and a time to mend;  
A time to be silent, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
A time for war, and a time for peace.

What does the worker gain by what he exerts himself? I have considered the sore task which God assigned to men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; he has also set the world in their hearth, without man's discovering what it

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possessed of a quickening power which money cannot produce. Excess in any direction and folly are likely to disturb and shorten life. Be wise enough not to be over-sensitive to criticism.

You may dig a pit to entrap your enemy, and then fall into it yourself. Prudence is needed in many applications. In pulling down a fence, if you are not careful, a serpent lodging in the crannies may bite you.

Show kindness (cast your bread) even where a return is least to be expected. A blessing, though long delayed, is likely to result. Be not niggardly in bestowing favors; you may need them yourself. Existence has its pleasures, but its span is short. The brevity of life should be a motive for enjoying it while it lasts. The knowledge that sinful indulgence will be punished should check excess in youthful behavior.

לא־במֵצָא הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַמְּצָשָׁה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים מִרְאֵשׁ  
וְעַד־סִירֵב: רַדְעֵתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב בָּם כִּי אִם־לְשָׁמָחָה וְלְעָשָׂות  
טוֹב בְּהָיוֹ: וְגַם כָּל־הָאָרֶם שִׁיאָכָל וְשִׁתָּה וְרָאָה טוֹב  
בְּכָל־עַמְּלֵוֹ מִתְתַּחַת אֱלֹהִים הִיא: רַדְעֵתִי כִּי כָּל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה  
הָאֱלֹהִים רֹאָה יַהֲנֵה לְעַלְלָם עַלְיָו אֵין לְחוֹסִיף וּמְפַנֵּו אֵין  
לְגַעַשׂ וְהָאֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה שִׁירָא מִלְּפָנָיו: מִזְהָשָׁה בְּכָר  
הִיא וְאֲשֶׁר לְהֻזָּת בָּכָר הַהָּאֱלֹהִים יַבְקֵשׁ אֶת־גְּרוּתָה:  
וַיַּד רְאֵתִי תְּחִתַּה שְׁמָשׁ מִקּוּם הַמְּשֻׁבֶּט שְׁמָה הַרְשָׁעָה  
וּמִקּוּם הַצָּדֶק שְׁמָה דָּרְשָׁי: אִמְרָתוֹ אֵין בְּלֵבִי אֶת־הַצָּדֶק  
וְאֶת־דָּרְשָׁי וְשָׁעַטְתִּי הָאֱלֹהִים גָּדִית לְכָלְחָפֵץ וְלֹל כָּל  
הַמְּשֻׁשָׁה: אִמְרָתוֹ אֵין בְּלֵבִי עַל־דְּבָרָתִי בְּעַד הָאָרֶם  
לְבִרְתָּם הָאֱלֹהִים וְלְרָאֵת שְׁהָסֶבֶתְמָה הַמָּה לְהַמָּה: כִּי  
מִקְרָה בְּנֵי־הָאָרֶם וּמִקְרָה גְּבָרָה וּמִקְרָה אֶחָד לְהַמָּה  
בְּמִתְתַּחַת וְהַבָּן מִותָּה וְוֹרֶתֶת אֶחָד לְכָל וּמִתְּלָרֶת הָאָרֶם מִקְרָה  
דְּבָרָמָה אֵין כִּי חַבֵּל הַבָּל: הַבָּל דַּוְלָק אֶל־מִקְרָה אֶחָד  
הַבָּל הִיא מִזְדַּעְפָּר וְהַבָּל שֵׁב אֶל־מִזְדַּעְפָּר: מִי יָדַע רְוַתָּה  
בְּעַד הָאָרֶם הַצִּילָה הִיא לְמַעַלָּה וְוֹרֶתֶת גְּבָרָה הַיְדִידָה  
הִיא לְמַטָּה לְאָרֶן: וְרְאֵתִי כִּי אֵין טוֹב מְאֹשֶׁר יְשָׁמַחַת  
הָאָרֶם בְּמַעַשָּׂיו כִּי־זֹא חָלְקָנוּ כִּי מַיְכַאַת לְרָאֹת בָּמָה  
שְׁהָיָה אַחֲרֵיו:

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Koheleth has found that wisdom, culture, pleasure are good, but there is still something lacking: they do not explain the mystery of existence. Wisdom lies in adapting ourselves to the designs of God, who is the God of order. The events between birth and death make up the sum of human existence. God allots to all men a season for all that life has appointed for them.

is that God has done from beginning to end. I do know that there is nothing better for men than to enjoy themselves as long as they are alive. When a man can eat and drink and find satisfaction in all his efforts, it is a gift from God. I know that whatever God does endures forever; to it nothing can be added, and from it nothing can be taken away. God has made it so, that men should revere him. That which was, has been ever since; and that which is to be, has already been. God is ever seeking out what has been driven away.

Another thing I observed under the sun, that where justice should bear sway, there is wickedness; where uprightness should be found, there is evil. I said to myself: God will judge both the just and the wicked, since there is a time for everything and every action. I said to myself, with regard to human beings: God causes them to see that they are no better than animals. The fate of men and the fate of animals are the same; as one dies, so dies the other; all have the same life breath; man has no advantage over the beast, for all is vanity. All are bound for the same place; all have come from the dust, and all are returning to the dust. Who can be sure that the human breath of life ascends on high, and the animal breath of life goes down earthward? So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to be happy in what he is doing, for this is his lot; indeed, who can bring him to see what will be after him?

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The mass of human suffering and the absence of pity are such that better off are the dead and still more the unborn. Man is disturbed and perplexed by his own perversity. The world is full of trouble. The weak are oppressed by the strong. Success involves envy. It is better to be secure and at peace.

Koheleth illustrates the advantages of companionship. Unitedly men may effect what singly they cannot accomplish, while they enjoy their gains better together than alone. The efforts of the lonely man to attain wealth are vain. There is safety and comfort in the possession of a friend.

Accumulation of wealth is vain, since it brings little pleasure and much anxiety. Sometimes wealth is accumulated by labor and lost by misfortune,

לשבתי אני ואראה את-כל-דעותكم אשר נעשים פחת  
השימוש ותעה | דמעת המלכים ו אין לך מנוח ומיד  
עשותם כהן ו אין לך מנוח: ושבתי אני את-דעתיכם  
שכבר מתי מונחים אשר רמה חיט עדרה: וטבל  
משיחם את אשר-ענין לא הוה אשר לא-ראה את-  
המעשה הרע אשר נעשה פחת השימוש: וראיתי אני  
את-כל-צמל ואת כל-בשרון המעשה כי היא קנא-תאיש  
טבון נסעה הצל ורעות רוח: ובסיל חבק אה-זיו  
ואכל את-בשרו: טוב מלא כף נחת ממלא חפנעם עמל  
וירעות רוח: ושבתי אני ואראה הצל פחת השימוש: יש  
אחד ו אין שני נם בון ואח אדלו ו אין קוז לכל-עמלו נס-  
עינו לא-תשבע עשר ולמי | אין עמל ומחכר את-ינפל-  
מטובה נסעה הצל וענן רע היא: טובם השעים מך  
האחד אשר ישילום שבר טיב בימים: כי אס-פלו  
האחד בקום את-חברו ואילו ההאחד שיפל ואין שני  
לקיים: נם אס-שבבו שנים חם להם ולאחד אד-  
חם: ואס-יתקפו ההאחד השעים ימדו גנו וחותט  
המשלש לא במדדה עתק: טיב יולד מכבו וחכם ממלך  
וקו ובסיל אשר לא-זיו להזיר עוד: ברמאות הנסרים  
זיא למלך כי נם במלכיה נולד רשות: ראיינו את-כל-

so that the possessor has no enjoyment out of it. It is best to eat and drink and enjoy life without too much reflection. The wise, no less than the fools, the poor equally with the rich, find imperfect satisfaction in life.

## IV

Again I considered all the acts of oppression practised here under the sun; there are the oppressed in tears with none to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there is power, and there is none to console them! So I deemed the dead, who are already dead, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive. Better off than either is he who has not yet been, who has not witnessed the evil that is practised under the sun.

Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work mean envy between man and man. This too is futility and a striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. Better one handful with contentment than two handfuls with toil and futile effort. I saw another futile thing under the sun: a person who has nobody, no companion, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, without satisfying himself with wealth; [he never asks himself]: "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is futility and a miserable task.

Two are better than one; they get a better return for their work. If either falls, his companion helps him up; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and there is no other person to help him up. Again, if two sleep together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? If one [foe] attacks either, the two can resist him. A three-ply cord is not quickly broken.

Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but ignorant king, who no longer knows how to be careful. Out of prison one has come to be king in the very kingdom where he was born in poverty. I watched all the living under the sun flocking to the side of

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God sometimes gives the means of enjoying life, but withholds the power of enjoyment. A life without enjoyment is protracted misery ending in death. Toil is for the appetite which is insatiable; the wise are no better off than the fools. The destiny of man has been determined for him; he cannot struggle against it, nor does he know what is good for him.

קְרָתָה בְּמַלְכָתָךְ וְתִמְמָתָה בְּמַלְכָתָךְ וְתִמְמָתָה בְּמַלְכָתָךְ  
זָכָר מִתְּנִזְנִזָּה: אַדְגָּז לְכָלְדָּנִים לְכָלְ אַסְטרָהָן לְפָרָהָם  
בְּמַתְּהָרָה אַדְהָרָהָם אַדְגָּז שְׁמָרָהָבָה בְּבָבָּהָה הַבָּל וְתִמְמָתָה  
שְׁמָרָהָבָה אַבְּרָהָם אַבְּרָהָם הַאֲלָהָתָם וְקָרָב לְשָׁמָרָה  
מִתְּמָתָה וְמִתְּמָתָה בְּאַבְּרָהָם יְהָמָתָה מִתְּמָתָה:

## ה

אַל-תַּבְּרֵל מַלְפָּךְ וְלִקְרָא אַל-יְמַרְּ לְזִבְחָא דָבָר לְעֵזָר  
הַאֲלָהָתָם קַיְמָלָה אֲלָהָתָם בְּשִׁמְתָּם אַתָּה מַלְ-דָּאָתָם מַלְ-כָּמָן  
תְּמַעַן דְּבָרָךְ מִמְּשִׁמָּה: בְּיַעַן הַתְּהָלָם בְּרָב גִּזְעָן וְלֹא כְּסָבָל  
בְּרָבְבָּהָרָם: כְּאַשְׁר תְּהַנְּרֵל אֲלָהָתָם אַל-תַּהֲנֵר לְשִׁלְמָה  
כְּאַז שְׁמָעָן בְּבָבָלִים אַת אַשְׁר-תַּהֲנֵר שִׁלְמָה:  
לְאַתָּה מִשְׁתְּחַדֵּה וְלֹא תְּשַׁלֵּחַ: אַל-תַּעֲשֵׂה אַרְבָּךְ לְפָנֵיךְ  
אַתָּה-שְׁמָדָה אַל-תַּאֲמֵן לְפָנֵיךְ שְׁמָדָה תְּאַמְּנֵה:  
יְהָמָתָה רַאֲלָהָתָם שְׁלַקְלָהָד תְּהָל אַתְּ-מִשְׁתְּחַדֵּה: כְּיַעֲשֵׂה  
תְּלִיחָתָה תְּבָלִים קְרָבָתָה הַבָּהָרָה בְּיַעֲשֵׂה תְּמִתָּה  
אַתָּה-שְׁמָדָה וְלֹא מִשְׁעָנָה הַדְּבָרָק מִתְּאַתָּה בְּמִדְבָּרָה אַל-  
מִתְּהַעַת מַלְהָמָה תְּפָנָה מִבְּרָתָה מִבְּלָתָה:

אַל-תַּעֲשֵׂה

רַאֲלָהָדָה that is, watch your step, do not go astray. Listen to the  
counsel of the sages. Be not like the ignorant fools who commit sins and offer  
sacrifices without repenting, without even being aware of their wrongdoing.

a second youth who was to replace him. Endless numbers of people [applauded him] more than anyone in the past; yet, those of a later generation will not be happy with him. Indeed, this too is futility and a striving after wind.

Watch your step when you go to the house of God, and be ready to learn; it is better than the offering of sacrifice by the ignorant, who know not when they do wrong.

## V

Be not hasty with your mouth, and let not your heart be quick to utter a word before God; for God is in heaven, and you are on earth; so let your words be few. Dreams come with many cares, and a fool's voice with many words. When you make a vow to God, delay not paying it. He is displeased with fools; pay what you vow. Better not vow at all than vow and fail to pay. Let not your mouth make you guilty; do not tell the messenger that it was an error; why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands? Like so many empty dreams are so many empty words; revere God.

When you see the poor being oppressed, when right and justice are perverted in the country, be not surprised, for the high officia is being watched by his superior, and above these are others higher still. The total advantage of a country is a king who makes himself servant to the land.

A lover of money will never be satisfied with money; whoever loves wealth reaps no fruit from it; this is futility. The more the

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**אֲלֵל תְּבַהַל עַל פְּךָ** is interpreted by Rashi as a warning against accusing God who permits disasters or misfortunes to occur in the world. Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, in his philosophic work *Kuzari*, declares that a person who is convinced of the Creator's justice and wisdom will pay no attention to apparent cases of divine injustice on earth. Ibn Ezra and others interpret the verse as relating to man's prayers. God in heaven should be addressed in lucid, brief language. The fool is possessed of too many words, which obscure the message that he desires to convey.

ברבות הטעבה רבו אוכליה ומה כשרו לבעליה כי  
 אם ראות עיניו מתייקה שנות העבר אם מיט ואך  
 הרבה יאכל והשבעל לעישר אין מיט לו לישין: יש  
 רעה תוליה ראייה פחתה השמש עשר שמר לבעליו  
 להיעת: ואך העישר הדריא בעינן רע והילד בנו ואין  
 בדין מאימה: כאשר יצא מטען אמו ערות ישוב לרכת  
 בשבאה ומאמיה לא ישא בעמלו שילך בדין: ונסזה  
 רעה חוליה כלעמת טבא בו ילק ומהתרכז לו שיגמל  
 להעת: גם כל ימי בחשך יאכל ובעס תרבה והלוי  
 ונאית: הדה אשר ראייה אני טוב אשר יפה לאכילה  
 ולשתות ולראות טוביה בבלעמלו שיגמל פחתה השמש  
 מספר ימינו אשר נתן לו האלים כי היא חלקו:  
 גם פלד האדם אשר נתן לו האלים עשר ונכים  
 השלטו לאכל ממען ולעתה אתחילו ולעתה בעמלו  
 זו מעת האלים היא: כי לא תרבה זכר את ימי נז  
 כי האלים מענה בשמתת לבו:

## ג

יש רעה אשר ראייה פחתה השמש ורבה היא על האדם:  
 איש אשר יתנו לו האלים פועל ונכים וביד ואין ש  
 חסר לנפשו ומכל אשר יתאנה ולא שלטנו האלים  
 לאכל ממען כי איש נבר יאכלו זה דבל חלי רע הוא:

Koheleth finds sincerity rare among men, but among women still more rare. God made man straight, but man endlessly invents subtle and vain attempts to attain happiness. קרי ראתה. סיד.

gain, the more there are to consume it; what advantage has the owner, then, except looking on? Sweet is the worker's sleep whether he has much to eat or little; but the full stomach of the rich man does not let him sleep.

I have observed a painful evil under the sun: wealth hoarded by its owner to his hurt. Should that wealth be lost in a bad venture, the man has nothing to leave to the son he has begotten. Naked he came from his mother's womb, and naked he must return, as he came; for all his toil, he has nothing to take with him. This too is a sore evil, that as he came so he must go; what does he gain by all his futile toil? He spent all his days in gloominess, deep anxieties, sickness and wrath.

Here is what I consider now as good and right for man: to eat and drink and enjoy himself, as he toils on at his work under the sun, during the few years of his life which God has granted him; such is his lot. It is God's own gift when any man, to whom God has given riches and possessions and enabled him to partake of them, consumes his share and is happy in his work. He will never brood over the shortness of his life when God keeps his mind busy with the joy of his heart.

## VI

There is one evil which I have observed under the sun; it bears heavily upon man: there is the man to whom God grants riches, possessions and honor, so that he lacks none of all the things he desires; yet God does not grant him the power to partake of it; a stranger enjoys it instead. This is futility indeed, a

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Elsewhere (Proverbs 31:10-31), we find one of the most beautiful descriptions of the perfect housewife, trusted by her husband and admired by the people. She is kind to the poor and gentle to all; she is self-respecting and dignified. Husband and children praise her as the source of their happiness.

אם-וילך אַשׁ מֵאָה וְשָׁלִים רְבָות חַרְחָה. וְרַב וְשָׁדוֹן יִמְרְשָׁנוּ וְנִפְשְׁוּ לְאַחֲתְּשָׁפֵעַ מִקְדָּשָׁבָה וְנִמְקַבְּרָה לֹא דָתָה לֹא אָמְרָה טֹב מִפְשֵׁת גַּגְפֵּל: קְרַבְתָּבָל בָּא וּבְחַשְׁךְ בָּלָך וּבְחַשְׁךְ שָׁמֶן יִכְפֵּה: נִמְ-שָׁמֶן לְאַ-רְאָה וְלֹא דָעַ נִתְהַלֵּה מִזְהָה: וְאַל דָתָה אַלְפָה שְׁנִים פְּעָמִים וּמְזָבָה לְאַרְאָה הַלָּא אַלְמָקָרָם אָחָד נִכְלָל חַזְלָך: בְּלַעַמְלָל הָאָדָם לְפָדוּ וְנִמְ-הַגְּשֵׁט לְאַתְמָלָא: כִּי מֵה-יִתְרַעַת לְחַקְמָם מִקְדָּשָׁל מֵה-לְעַנִּי יִתְעַלְמָךְ עַנְדְּקָתִים: טֹב מִרְאָה שְׁנִים מִבְלָך-נִפְשֵׁט נִמְ-הָה נִכְלָל וּרְשָׁוֹת רְחוֹה: מֵה-שְׁהָה בְּבָרָן נִכְרָא שָׁמֶן וְנוֹעַד אֲשֶׁר-רוֹא אָדָם וְלֹא-יַכְלֵל לְחַזְקָה עַם שְׁהַתְּקִיף מִפְשֵׁת: כִּי יְשִׁידָבָרִים נִרְבָּה מִרְבִּים נִכְלָל מֵה-יִתְרַעַת לְאָדָם: כִּי מַי-יִתְעַלְמָךְ מֵה-טֹב לְאָדָם בְּחַדִּים מִסְפָּר יִמְרְדֵּל נִכְלָל וְעַשְׁמָם כְּגָל אַשְׁלַמְרִיד לְאָדָם מִהְזִינָה אַתְעִזִּי פָתַת הַשְּׁמָשָׁה:

## ז

טוֹב שֵׁם מִשְׁמָנוּ טֹב רַיִם דְּלָלוֹת מִזְמָה תְּלָזוֹה: טֹב לְלִיכָת אַלְמִית אַבְלָלְבָת אַלְמִית מִשְׁתָה בְּאַסְדָר דָא סְוִף כְּלָה אָדָם וְהַתְּזִקְנָה יְתַזְנָה אַלְלָבָו: טֹב בְּעַס מִשְׁחָק כְּרַבְרַע פָנִים יִטְבֵ לְבָב לְבָב לְבָב חַקְמִים בְּכַוּת אַבְל וְלַב

רַיִם שִׁזְקָד.

Chapter seven begins with a play on the alliterative Hebrew words *shem* and *shemen* ('name and oil'), in the sense that a good name smells sweeter than precious perfume. A good name remains even after death. A man's life cannot be judged happy till its end is reached; hence the day of death is better than

sore affliction. Should a man have a hundred children and live many years, no matter to what great age, still if he has not the full benefit of his good fortune, or if he is deprived of burial, a stillborn child is better off than he. Though an untimely birth comes and goes in vain and into darkness, and its name is enveloped in darkness; though it has not seen or known the sun; yet it is better off than such a man, even if he should live a thousand years twice over, but find no happiness; do not all go to the same place [whether they die young or old]?

All a man's toil is for his mouth, but his appetite is never satisfied. What advantage has the wise man over the fool? What benefit has the poor man for all he knows how to behave toward the living? Better is what the eyes can see than what can be imagined. That too is futility and a striving after wind [seeing does not satisfy unattained desires].

Whatever has happened had been determined long ago; it is known, that man cannot argue with One mightier than he is. Lavish talk merely adds to the futility; what advantage does man derive from it? Who knows what is good for man in life during the brief period of his vain existence, which passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen under the sun after he is gone?

## VII

Better a good name than good oil; the day of death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting, for that is the end of all men, and the living should keep that in mind. Grief is better than gaiety, because in sadness the heart may grow cheerful. The heart of wise men turns to the house of mourning, but the heart of fools turns to the house of mirth.

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the day of birth. Since affliction is the common lot of all men, it is better to visit the house of mourning than the house of feasting, so that the living should take to heart and consider that both happiness and adversity come from God. Do not go to extremes. Gossip should not be listened to, since one is sure to hear something unpleasant about himself.

בְּסִילִים בְּבֵית שְׁמָחוֹה: טֹוב לְשָׁמֶעָ גַּעֲרַת חָכָם מְאַיֵּשׁ  
 שְׁמֶעָ שָׁיר בְּסִילִים: כִּי בְּקוֹל הַסִּירִים תַּחַת דָּפֶר בָּן  
 שַׁתְּקַה הַבְּסִיל וְגַםְזָה הַבָּל: כִּי הַעֲשָׂק הַזָּלֶל חָכָם  
 וַיַּאֲבַר אֶת-לְבָב מִתְּנָה: טֹוב אֲחַתִּית דָּכָר מַרְאֵשִׁיתוֹ טֹוב  
 אַרְקָדוֹת מִגְּבָה רֹוח: אַל-תַּהֲבֵל בְּרוֹחַק לְכָעִים כִּי  
 כְּעַם בְּתִיק בְּסִילִים יָנוֹת: אַל-תָּאִמֵּר מַה הַהָּשְׁחִים  
 הַרְאָשִׁים הֵן טוֹבִים מְאַלָּה כִּי לֹא מְחַכְּמָה שָׁאַלְתָּ עַל  
 הָהָ: טוֹבָה חָכְמָה עַמְּנִחָלָה וַיַּתֵּר לְרַאֵי הַשְּׁמָשׁ: כִּי  
 בְּצָל הַחָכְמָה בְּצָל הַכְּסָף וַיַּתְּרוּן דִּיעַת הַחָכְמָה תְּהִירָה  
 בְּעַלְהָ: רָאָה אֶת-מִעֵשָׂה הַאֲלֹהִים כִּי מִי יוּכֵל לִתְמֹקֵן  
 אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָזָה: בַּיּוֹם טוֹבָה הָתָה בְּטוֹב וּבְנָום רְעוֹה רָאָה  
 גַּם אֶת-זָהָה לְעַמְּתִיזָה עַשְׂה הַאֲלֹהִים עַל-דְּבָרַת שְׁלָא  
 יִמְצָא הָאָרֶם אֶת-רוֹי מְאוֹמָה: אֶת-הַבָּל רְאִיתִי בַּיּוֹם  
 הַבָּל יִשְׁצְדִּיק אֶבֶד בְּצָדְקָנוּ וַיַּשְׁרַע מְאַרְיךָ בְּגַעַתָּה: אַל-תַּהֲרַע צְדִיק לְרַבָּה וְאַל-תַּהֲרַע סְכָל לְמָה חִטּוֹת בְּלֹא עַתָּה:  
 אַל-תַּרְשַׁע הַרְבָּה וְאַל-תַּהֲרַע סְכָל לְמָה חִטּוֹת בְּלֹא עַתָּה:  
 טֹוב אֲשֶׁר תָּאַחַז בָּה וְגַם-תִּזְעַז אַל-תִּפְעַז אֶת-יְהָדָה  
 אֲלֹהִים וְצָא אֶת-כְּלָם: הַחָכְמָה תַּעֲזַב לְחָכָם מַעֲשָׂרָה  
 שְׁלִיטִים אֲשֶׁר הֵן בָּעֵיר: כִּי אֲרָם אַזְנִיק בָּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר  
 יַעֲשֵׂה-טֹוב וְלֹא יַחֲטָא: גַּם לְכָל-דְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר יַדְבֵּר  
 אַל-תִּפְעַז לְבָד אֲשֶׁר לְאַתְּ שְׁמַע אֶת-עַבְדָךְ מַקְלִילָךְ: כִּי  
 גַּסְפָּעִים רְכּוֹת יְגַע לְבָד אֲשֶׁר גַּסְאָתְךָ קְלִילָת אֶת-רְבִירִים:  
 בְּלִיהָ נְפִיטִי בְּחָכְמָה אָמְרָתִי אֲחָבָה וְתָא רְחוּקָה  
 מְמַנִּי: רְחוֹק מִרְחַשְׁתָּה וְעַמְקָק עַמְקָק מִי יִמְצָאנוּ: סְבּוֹתִי

קְרִיָּה אֲתָה.

It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man, than for a person to hear the praise song of fools. For, like the sound of thorns crackling under cooking pots is the laughter of a fool. This too is futility; oppression makes the wise man foolish, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Better is the end of something than its beginning; better is the patient temperament than the proud temperament. Never be hasty in your temper, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools. Never ask: "Why were the early days better than these?" You would be asking an unwise question. It is good to possess wisdom along with an estate, an advantage to those who see the sun. For wisdom like wealth is a protection; but knowledge does more good: wisdom safeguards the person who has it.

Observe the work of God; who can straighten what he has made bent? Be pleased in the day of prosperity, and in the day of adversity consider that God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may never know what lies ahead.

I have seen everything during my vain existence, the good man perishing for all his goodness and the evil man flourishing for all his wickedness. Be not over-righteous, be not over-wise; why should you become desolate? Be not excessively bad; be not ignorant; why should you die before your time?

The best way is that you grasp one thing, yet you must not let go of the other. He who reveres God fulfills his duty toward all. Wisdom is better protection for the wise than ten wardens within the city. No man on earth is always just, whose good deeds are without some sinful lapse.

Pay no attention to all that people say, lest you hear your own servant cursing you. You know full well that many times you have reviled others.

I have tested all this by means of wisdom; I thought I would be wise, but wisdom is beyond me. Far off is that which exists,

אני ולבני לצעית ולתור ובקש חכמה חשבון ולעת  
רשות בסל והסכלות הוללות: ומזה אן מר מפנות  
אתה אשלה אשדרה מצדדים ותדרמים לבה אסורים  
תדרה טוב לפני האלים ימלט ממנה וחוטא ילכדר בה:  
ראה זה מצאתי אמרה קהילת אתה לאחת למציא  
חשבון: אשר עוד בקעה נפש ולא מצאתי אדם אחד  
מאלף מצאתי ואשה בכל אלה לא מצאתי: לבד ראה  
זה מצאתי אשר עשה האלים את האדים ישר הפה  
בקשי השבניות רביהם:

## ח

מי בקהנים ומי יוציא פשר רבר חכמת אמת האור פניו  
תנו פניו ישנא: אן פרמלך שמר וועל דברת שכיעית  
אליהם: אל תהבד מפניהם תלך אל תקען בדבר רע  
כى בלאשר הצעז עיטה: באשר דברמלך שליטין ומי  
יאמרך מה הטעיה: שימר מצה לא בעך דבר רע עית  
ומשפטך בעך לב חכם: כى לבלהבעך יש עית ומשפט  
ברית האדים רפה עליו: כראינו ידע מה שיתה כי  
באשר יהיה מי גידר לו: אין אדם שלט ברווח לבלא  
אתדרות ואין שלטן ביום הפטות אין משלחות  
במלחה ולא ימלט רשי אתביבו: אתחבלגה באיזו  
ועתן אתה לבי לבל מעשה אשר נעשה תחת השם עת  
אשר שלט האדים באדים לרע לו: ובכן ראיינו רשיים  
קבירים ובאו וממקום קדוש תלבו ותשפטך בעך אשר

and deep it lies, very deep; who can find it out? I turned my thoughts toward knowledge, to explore, to search wisdom and the sum of reality, to identify evil as ignorance and stupidity as madness.

I have discovered something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart consists of traps and snares, whose hands are chains. He whom God favors escapes her, but the sinner is caught by her.

Behold, this is what I have found, says Koheleth. Adding one thing to another, to find the sum total which my mind had sought repeatedly without success, I have found one man in a thousand, but have not found one woman in all these. Here is all I have been able to discover, namely: God has made man upright, but they have contrived many hidden subtleties.

## VIII

Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of a thing? A man's wisdom illumines his face, and the harshness of his countenance is transformed. I say: keep the king's command, and that in view of the oath in the name of God. Do not hasten to leave his presence; do not persist in an evil matter, for he can do as he pleases. A king's word is law; who dare say to him: "What are you doing?" He who obeys his command will experience no harm; a wise mind will know the proper time. Everything has its own time and method; human misery is great indeed. Man does not know what will happen, and who can tell him how it will happen? No man can control the wind, to hold the wind in check; nor has he the power over the day of death: there is no furlough in war, and evil cannot save the wrongdoer.

All this I have observed, keeping in mind what is being done under the sun, when one man tyrannizes over another man to do him harm. Then I saw the wicked being buried at a ripe age, while those who had done right departed from the holy place and were forgotten in the city. This too is absurd. Because the sen-

בְּרוּכָתוֹ נִסְתַּחַת הַבָּל: אֲשֶׁר אָזְנַעֲשָׂה פְתָנָם מַעֲשָׂה  
גְּרָעָה מִנְרָה עַל־בָּנָן מֶלֶא לְבִבְנֵי־אֲדָם בְּהָם לְעֵשָׂות  
הַצָּעָד: אֲשֶׁר תְּפַא עֲשָׂה תַּעֲמַת וּמְאַרְךָ לְזַיְנָה נִסְתַּחַת  
אָנָי אֲשֶׁר קְדוּד־טוֹב לִירָאִי דָּאָלָהִים אֲשֶׁר יָוָרָא מַלְפִנֵּי:  
וּטוֹב לְאַזְהָה לְרַשְׁעָה וּלְאַיָּאָרָךְ יָמִים בְּגַל אֲשֶׁר אִינָה  
בְּנָא מַלְפִנֵּי אֲלָהִים: שְׁדַבֵּל אֲשֶׁר נִעֲשָׂה עַל־דָּאָרָךְ  
אֲשֶׁר וְיַשׁ צְדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר מַגְעַץ אֲלָהִים בְּמַעֲשָׂה הַרְשָׁעִים  
וְתַשׁ רְשָׁעִים שְׁמַגְעַץ אֲלָהִים בְּמַעֲשָׂה הַצְדִיקִים אֲמְרָתִי  
שְׁנִסְתַּחַת הַבָּל: וּשְׁבָחָתִי אֲנִי אֶת־דְּשָׁמָה אֲשֶׁר אִיךְ  
טוֹב לְאָדָם תְּחַת הַשְׁמָשָׂה בַּיְם אֶסְלָאָבָל וְלִשְׁתָּוֹת וְלִשְׁמָות  
הַזָּא יְלַעַג בְּעַמְלָיו יְמִי חַיָּיו אֲשֶׁר־נִתְרָלוּ הָאֲלָהִים תְּחַת  
הַשְׁמָשָׂה: בְּאֲשֶׁר נִתְחַתִּי אֶת־לְבִי לְדַעַת הַכְּמָה וּלְרָאוֹת  
אֶת־דְּעָנֵן אֲשֶׁר נִעֲשָׂה עַל־דָּאָרָךְ בַּיְם בְּיָמָם וּבְלִילָה  
שְׁנָה בְּעֵינָיו אִינָה רִאָה: וּרְאִיתָ אֶת־כְּלָמָדָעָה הָאֲלָהִים  
בַּיְם לֹא יוּכֶל הָאָדָם לְמִצְאָה אֶת־דְּקָמָעָה אֲשֶׁר נִעֲשָׂה  
תְּחַת־הַשְׁמָשָׂה בָּשָׁל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲמֵל הָאָדָם לְבַקֵּשׁ וְלֹא יִמְצָא  
וְלֹם אֶסְדִּיאָמֶר הַחַכְםָ לְדַעַת לֹא יוּכֶל לְמִצְאָה:

## ט

בַּיְם אֶת־כְּלָלָה נִתְחַתִּי אֶל־לְבִי וְלִבּוֹר אֶת־כְּלָלָה אֲשֶׁר  
הַצְדִיקִים וְהַבְּקִים וְעַבְדִים בְּנֵדֶד הָאֲלָהִים נִסְאָרָה  
נִסְתַּנָּה אֶن יַדְעַל הָאָדָם הַבָּל לְפִנֵּים: הַבָּל בְּאֲשֶׁר  
לְבָל מִקְדָּה אֶחָד לְצִדְיק וּלְרַשְׁעָה לְטוֹב וּלְטֹהָר וּלְטָמֵא  
וּלְזָבֵח וְלֹא־שְׁרֵך אִינָה זְבַח כְּטוֹב כְּחַטָּאת הַגְּשָׁבָע בְּאֲשֶׁר

tence for wrongdoing is not promptly executed, men's heart is filled with the desire to do evil.

Though a sinner commits evil a hundred times, God is patient with him.

But I am certain that those who revere God, and fear him, will fare well; the bad man will not fare well and will not survive long, like a shadow, since he does not revere God.

It is absurd what is being done on earth: good men fare as the wicked should fare, and wicked men fare as though they were good. I declare that this makes no sense.

So I commend enjoyment, because there is nothing good for man under the sun but to eat and drink and be happy. This will accompany him in his toiling during the life God grants him under the sun.

When I applied my mind to acquire wisdom and to observe the activity which takes place on earth, for man sleeps neither by day nor by night, I saw all the work of God that is done under the sun. However much man toils in searching, he cannot discover the meaning of it; and though the wise man may think he is about to know it, he cannot discover it all.

## IX

All this I have kept in mind, clearly observing it all, how the just and the wise and their works are in God's power. Man cannot know about God's love or hatred. Anything may be in store for anyone. All things come alike to all; the same chance befalls the innocent and the guilty; to the good and pure and to the unclean, to him who brings an offering and to him who does not. As it is with the good man, so it is with the sinner; as with the one who swears, so with him who fears an oath.

שביעיה נרא: זה ור' בצל אשר נעשה תחת השם  
 כי מקריה אחד לבל ונם לב בינו אדם מלארע והוללות  
 בלבבם בהרים ואחריו אלדיותם: כי מי אשר יבר  
 אל בלבם יש בפיזון כי לבן ח' הוא טוב מך  
 הארץ נמת: כי הרים יודעים שמעתו והמתים אין  
 יודעים מואמה ואיך עד לדם שבר כי נשפח זכרם:  
 גם אהבתם נסחנאתם נסכךנותם כבר אהבה והליך  
 עד לעולם בצל אשר נעשה תחת השם:  
 לך אבל בשמך לך לחםך ושתה בלב-טוב יי'ך כי כבר  
 רעה האלים את מעשיך: בכללותך יי'ך בנוך לבנים  
 ושם עליך אשך אלהיך: ראה חים עס-אשה אשר  
 אהבת בליך תני הבהך אשר נסך לך תחת השם בלב  
 ימי הבהך כי היא חלך ביחסים ובעמלך אשר אתה עמל  
 תחת השם: כל אשר תמצא לך לעשות בכח עשה  
 כי אין מעשה וחשבון ורעת וחקמה בשאול אשר אתה  
 דליך שם: שבתי וראה תהיד השם כי לא לקלים  
 המרוץ ולא לנבורים המלחמה נים לא לחקמים להס  
 ונם לא לבנים עשר ונם לא לדים הן בירעת ובגין  
 יקרה אטיבלים: כי נס לא ידיע האדם את עתו בנים  
 שנאחים במצויה רעה ובצערם האחים בפח להס  
 יוקשים בני האלים לעת רעה בשתפיל עליהם פתאים:  
 נסעה ראיתי חכמה תחת השם ונדלה היא אלוי:  
 עיר קפינה ואנשימים בה מעת ובאי-אליה מלך גודל ובקב  
 אתה ובנה עליה מצדדים גודלים: ומצאה בה איש מסכן

קרוי ח'בר. דבר.

This is the worst of all the things that happen under the sun, that one fate turns out the same for all. That is why the minds of men are filled with evil, and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and then they join the dead.

There is hope for anyone who is joined to the living; a live dog is better off than a dead lion.

The living know that they are to die, but the dead no longer know anything. They no longer have any compensation, for all memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate, their envy have long since perished. They will never again have part in anything that is done under the sun.

Go, then, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, since God has already approved your deeds. At all times let your clothing be white; spare not perfume on your head. Enjoy life with the woman you love, through all the fleeting days of your life, which God has granted you under the sun; for that is your share while you live and toil under the sun.

Whatever you are able to do, do with your full strength; for there is no doing or reckoning or knowing or understanding in the grave toward which you are going.

Once more I saw under the sun that the race is not won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong; nor is bread won by the wise, nor wealth by the intelligent, nor favor by the learned; indeed, a time of calamity overtakes them all.

Man never knows when his time will come; like fish caught in a fatal net, like birds seized in a snare, so are men caught when the time of disaster comes suddenly upon them.

This also I have observed as an example of wisdom under the sun, and it seems significant to me: there was a small city with few people in it, and a great king attacked it, surrounding it and building great siegeworks against it. But there was found in it a

חכם ומלווה אֶת דָּעֵיר בְּחִכְמָתוֹ וְאֶתְּמָלְכָתוֹ לֹא זָבֵר אֶת־  
הָאִישׁ הַמְּסִבֵּן הַרוֹא: וְאֶמְרָתִי אַנְיָ טָבָה חִכְמָה מִבְּוֹרָה  
וְחִכְמָתִ הַמְּסִבֵּן בְּזָוִיהַ וְדָבְרָיו אֲנָם נְשָׁמָעִים: דָבְרַי  
חִכְמָים בְּנָתָת נְשָׁמָעִים מְוֹשֵׁל בְּכִסְילִים: טָבָה  
חִכְמָה מִפְּלִי קָרְבָּן וְחוֹטָא אֶחָד יָאָבֵר טָבָה בְּרָבָה:

,

זָבֵבִי מָות יְבָאֵישׁ יְבָעֵ שָׁמֵן רָזְקָת יְגַר מִחְכָמָה מִכְבָּד  
סְכָלוֹת מִצְטָה: לְבָב חִכְמָתִ לִימָנוֹ וְלְבָב בְּסִיל לְשָׁמָאָלוֹ: וְגַם  
בְּדַרְךָ כַּשְׁבָּבָל הַלְּךָ לְבָוֹ חִכְרָ וְאֶמְרָ לְבָל סְבָּל הַזָּא:  
אֲסִירָתִ הַמוֹשֵׁל פָּעָלָה עַל־זֶה מִקְומָךְ אֶל־תְּעֵנָה בַּיּוֹרָפָא  
יְעִימָה חִתְאָם גְּדוּלִים: יְשָׁ רָעָה. רָאִיתִי תְּחִתָּה שָׁמֶשׁ  
בְּשָׁנָה שִׁיאָ מִלְּפָנֵי הַשְּׁלִיטִ: נְפַנֵּן הַסְּכָל בְּמִרוּםִים  
רְבָּים וְעִשְׂרָים בְּשָׁפֵל יְשָׁבוּ: רְאִיתִי עֲבָרִים עַל־סְסָסִים  
וְשָׂרִים הַלְּכִים בְּעִבְּדִים עַל־דָּארָץ: חַפֵּר גַּוְעָן בּוֹ יְפֹל  
וְפָרֶז גַּרְגַּר יְשָׁבֵעַ נְחַשָּׁ: מִשְׁעֵ אֲבָנִים וַיַּגְּבֵב בָּהָם בּוֹקָע  
עַצִּים יְפָכוּ בָּם: אִסְמִיקָה הַפְּרָזָל וְהָאָלָאָפָעִים קְלָקָל  
וְתִילִים גַּגְגָר וְתְרָזָן הַכְּשִׁיר חִכְמָה: אִסְמִישָׁד הַעֲשָׁש  
בְּלָא־לְחַשׁ וְאַזְן יְתָרָן לְבָעֵל הַלְּשׁוֹן: דָבְרַי פִּיחַדְתִּים  
וְשְׁפָתּוֹת בְּסִיל תְּבָלָעָנוּ: תְּחִלָּת דִּבְרִי הַוּסְכָלָות וְאַתְּרִית  
פִּיהָוּ דּוֹלְקָלוֹת רָעָה: וְהַסְּכָל יְרַבָּה דִּבְרִים לְאִירָעָה אַדְמָת  
מְהֻדְשִׁיהָוָה וְאַשְׁר יְהָוָה מַאֲחָרוֹן מִי גַּיְדַּלְךָ לֹו: עַמְלָל  
הַכִּסְילִים תִּגְעַשׂ אֲשָׁר לְאִירָעָה לְלִכְתָּא אַלְעָירָ: אַיְלָךְ  
אַרְצָן שְׁמַלְכָךְ נְעָר וְשְׁנָךְ בְּלָקָר יְאָכָלוּ: אַשְׁנָךְ אַרְצָן  
קָרִי: בְּצָפְבָל.

poor wise man, and he delivered the city by his wisdom. Yet no one remembered that poor man! I have said that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words go unheeded.

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but a single error can destroy much that is good.

## X

Dead flies make the perfumer's oil foul; a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. A wise man's heart turns him to his right; a fool's heart turns him to his left. Even when the fool walks through the street, he lacks sense, and says to everyone that he is a fool.

If the anger of the ruler flares up against you, do not resign your post; gentleness will make amends for great offenses.

There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler: folly is set in many high places, while the noble sit in lowly places. I have seen slaves on horseback, and princes plodding on foot like slaves.

He who digs a pit may fall into it; he who breaks down a wall may be bitten by a serpent. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them; he who splits logs is endangered by them.

If the axe is blunt, and one does not whet the edge, one must put more strength into the blow; wisdom helps one to succeed.

If the serpent bites because it has not been charmed, then the charmer's skill is without advantage.

The words of a wise man's mouth win favor, but the fool's lips destroy him. The beginning of his words is foolishness, and the end of his mouthing is evil madness. The fool prates on and on, though no man knows what it is all about; and who can tell him what will be after him?

The toil of a fool wearies him, so that he does not know the way to the city.

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a mere boy, and your princes feast in the morning! Happy are you, O land, when your

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king is the son of free men, and your princes feast at the proper time, in might, and not in drinking bouts.

Through laziness the roof sinks in; when the hands are slack the house leaks.

Bread is made for laughter, wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

Even in your thought do not curse the king; in the privacy of your bedroom do not revile the rich; because the birds of the air may carry your voice, some winged creature may reveal what you say.

## XI

Cast your bread upon the waters; after a long time you may find it again.

Contribute portions to seven, even to eight, for you know not what evil may happen upon the earth. If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth; when a tree falls, to south or north, where the tree falls, there it will lie. He who observes the wind will not sow; he who regards the clouds will not reap.

As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones of the child in the mother's womb, so you cannot know how God makes everything else.

Sow your seed in the morning [of life] and stay not your hand in the evening; for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will have success.

Sweet is the light [of life], and pleasant it is for the eyes to behold the sun.

If a man lives many years, let him have joy throughout them all; let him remember that the dark days will be many. All that comes [after death] is emptiness.

Rejoice in your youth, young man; let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; follow your heart's desire and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you to account.

Banish grief from your heart, and remove pain from your body, for youth and the dawn [of life] are fleeting vapor.

יב

וְכֹל אֶת-כָּרָא בַּיּוֹם בְּחֹרֶתְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָבֹא יְמָךְ  
 הַרְצָה וְהַגְּשָׁה שָׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הָאָמֵר אָזֶלֶי בְּהַמִּחְפִּזְן: עַד  
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תַחַשְׂךְ הַשְּׁמֵשׁ וְרָאֹר וְתַוְרֵחַ וְהַכּוֹבְדִים וְשָׁבָן  
 הַעֲבָדִים אַחֲרַ הַגְּשָׁם: בַּיּוֹם שִׁיוּעוֹ שְׁמָרִי הַבַּיִת וְהַתְּעוּתָה  
 אֲנָשִׁי הַחֵיל וּבְטַלְוָה הַטְּחָנוֹת בֵּי מִינְטוֹ וְחַשְׁבָנוֹ הַרְאֹות  
 בָּאֲרָבּוֹת: וְסָגַנוֹּ רְלָתִים בְּשָׂוֹק בְּשֶׁבֶל קָוֵל הַטְּחָנָה וְיִקּוֹטָן  
 לְקָוֵל הַצְּפֹר וַיְשַׁחַד כָּל-בָּנוֹת הַשִּׁיר: נִסְמַחַת יְרָאֹה  
 וְחַתְּחַתִּים בְּפָרָךְ וַיְנַאֲצֵץ הַשְּׁקָרְבָּן וַיְסַתְּבֵל הַחֲנָבָן וְחַפְרָן  
 הַאֲבּוֹנָה כִּי-הַלְּאָךְ הַאֲרָם אַלְכִּית עַלְמָוָן וְסַבְּבָן בְּשָׂוֹק  
 הַטְּפָרִים: עַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַרְחַק תַּבְּלִל הַכְּסָפָה וְתַרְצֵן גַּלְתָּה  
 הַוּבָב וְתַשְּׁבֵר בְּפֶל עַל-הַמְּבַיעַ וְגַרְזֵן הַגְּלָגָל אַלְהָבָרָה:  
 וַיְשַׁב הַעֲפָר עַל-הָאָרֶץ בְּשָׂהָה וְהַרְוֹת תְּשֻׁבָּה אַלְכִּילָּהִים  
 אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה: הַבָּל הַבְּלִים אָמֵר בְּקַדְשָׁת הַבָּל הַבָּל:  
 וַיְתַר שְׁהִינָּה קְרָלָת הַבָּם עַזְרָל לְפָרְדָּדָת אַתְּהָעָם וְאַנוּ  
 וְחַקְרָת תָּקָן מִשְׁלִים הַרְבָּה: בְּקַשׁ קְרָלָת לְמַצְאָה דְּבָרִי  
 חַפְזִין וְכַתְּבוֹב יְשַׁר דְּבָרִי אָמָת: דְּבָרִי חַכְמִים בְּקַרְבָּנוֹת  
 וּבְמִשְׁמָרוֹת נְטוּעִים בְּגַלְלָא אָסְפּוֹת נְתַנוֹ מַרְעָה אַחֲרָה: וְלֹא

The last verse of chapter seven refers to the faculties with which God endowed us for the perpetuation of mankind. However, our faculties are often corrupted and used for inferior purposes. According to the talmudic sages, our evil impulse (*יצר הרע*) was created for a positive purpose, for were it not for that impulse, a man would not build a house, marry a wife, beget children, or conduct business transactions. קרי. ברכך.

## XII

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years approach of which you will say: "I have no pleasure in them"; before the sun grows dark, and the light of the moon and the stars; and the clouds return after the rain; in the day when the house guards tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders fail because they are few; and those that look through the windows are dimmed, and the doors to the street are shut; when the sound of the mill runs low, and one rises at the chirp of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; when one is afraid of what is high, and terrors are in the street; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper grows sluggish, and desire fails. Because man goes to his eternal home, and mourners pass along the street; before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel is broken at the cistern; when the dust returns to earth once more, and the spirit to God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, says Koheleth, all is vanity!

The wiser Koheleth became, the more he taught the people knowledge; he weighed and examined and arranged many proverbs. Koheleth sought to find pleasing words, and to write down words of truth with precision.

The words of the wise are like goads; like nails driven home are the collected sayings given by one shepherd. My son, beware

A noted writer discovered in the last verse of chapter seven an incentive to better living: "You have had false prophets among you, who have told you that all men are nothing but fiends and wolves—half beast, half devil. Believe that, and indeed you may sink to that. But refuse that, and have faith that God made you upright."

חכמת אודם חאר פני (8:1) a person's wisdom is reflected in the serene and happy look on his face. פנֵי שׁוֹנֵא his fierce countenance is changed, that is a cultured person lends an attractive expression to his face, removing from it the forbidding look which repels.

מִרְאֵה בְּנֵי הַזָּר עֲשָׂוֹת סְפִרִים הַרְבָּה אֵין קָצֵן וְלֹא  
הַרְבָּה גִּנְתַּת בָּשָׂר: סְוֹף דָּבָר הַכָּל נִשְׁמָע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים  
יְרָא וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שָׁמֹר כִּרְזָה בְּלִדְבָּרָם: בַּי אֶת־כָּל־  
מִעְשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים יָבָא בְּמִשְׁפָט עַל בְּלִגְעָלָם אִם־טָב  
וְאִם־רָע:

**סְוֹף דָּבָר הַכָּל נִשְׁמָע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים יְרָא  
וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו שָׁמֹר כִּרְזָה בְּלִדְבָּרָם:**

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אֲנָן מְלֹחָה בְּמִלְחָמָה (8:8) has two midrashic interpretations, according to which the meaning is: a man cannot say, when summoned to die, "let my son, or my servant, or anyone else in my household, die instead of me." Or, a man cannot forge a weapon (שָׁלָח) to defend himself in his struggle against death. In the battle with death no release may be had. According to Deuteronomy 20:5-9, ablebodied men from twenty years of age, who were liable to military service, were exempted under certain conditions. The fainthearted, for example, were discharged, since fear is infectious, and the presence of such persons in the army would be a source of weakness and danger in the case of war.

לֹא יִמְלֹט רְשָׁע אֶת בָּעֵל־רָא has been taken to mean that no wicked schemes can save anyone whose time has come to die.

of anything beyond these. There is no end to the making of many books; much study is a weariness of the flesh.

In conclusion, summing it all up: Revere God, and keep his commands; for this is all there is to man. God will bring every deed to account, concerning every secret matter, whether it is good or evil.

In conclusion, summing it all up: Revere God, and keep his commands; for this is all there is to man.

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The first seven verses of chapter twelve have been interpreted as a description of the gradual failing of the human body, one organ after another, till death arrives: The light grows dim to the aged eyes, and reason is dulled. The limbs tremble; the arms become bent and feeble; the few teeth that are left no longer do the work of mastication. The means of communication with the outer world are shut; the voice is low and feeble; the slightest sound breaks in upon rest; music no longer gives pleasure. Sleeplessness becomes the old man's lot; the lightest weight is a burden. The golden bowl of the lamp of life is broken, and the silver cord, by which it is suspended, loosened; and the pitcher, which has often gone to draw at the fountain of life, is shattered, and so is the wheel. These are said to refer to the action of the lungs and of the heart.

טוֹרֵךְ דָבָר, the final summary of the book Koheleth is as follows: Revere God and keep his commandments, since this is the whole of man. This verse is repeated at the end of the public reading of the book of Koheleth in order not to conclude with the ominous word *ym* (evil). The same traditional rule applies to other occasions.

## מְגֻלַּת אֲסָפָר

א

וַיְהִי בַּיּוֹם אֲחַשְׁוֹרֹשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֹרֹשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִחְיָה וְעַד  
כּוֹשׁ שְׁבָעׁ וְעֶשֶׂרִים וּמִאָה מִדְינָה: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּם בְּשַׁבַּת  
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֹרֹשׁ עַל כִּסֵּא מֶלֶכְתָו אָשַׁר בְּשׁוֹשֵׁן הַבִּיהָה:  
בְּשִׁנְיָת שְׁלֹשׁ לְמִלְבָּדוֹ עֲשָׂה מִשְׁתָּחָה לְכָלִישָׁרִי וּעֲכָרִי  
תְּלִיל וְפָרָס וּמִרְיָה הַפְּרַתְמִים וּשְׁגָרִי הַמְּדִינִיּוֹת לְפָנָיו:  
בְּהַרְאָתוֹ אֲחַת-עָשָׁר בְּכֹד מֶלֶכְתָו וְאֲתִידְקָרָת הַפְּאָרָת  
וְדַוְלָתָתוֹ יְמִים רַבִּים שְׁמֻוּנִים וּמִאָת יוֹם: וּבְמִלְאָתָה יְמִים  
הָאֶלְהָה עֲשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָלִיחָעַם הַנִּמְצָאים בְּשׁוֹשֵׁן הַבִּיהָה  
לְמִגְדָּול וּעֲדִיקָתוֹ מִשְׁתָּחָה שְׁבָעַת יְמִים בְּחַצֵּר גִּנְתָּה בִּתְּמָן  
הַמֶּלֶךְ: חֹור וּכְרָפֵס וּתְכִלָּתָה אֲחָוָה בְּחַלְיִיכְוִין וְאַרְגָּמָן  
עַל-גְּלִילִי כְּסָף וּעֲמֹודִי שְׁשָׁה מִפְוֹתָה וְזָרָב וּכְסָף עַל רַצְפָּת  
בְּהַטִּישָׁש וְנָר וּסְהָרָת: וְהַשְׁקוֹת בְּכָלִי זָהָב וּכְלִים

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The events recounted in the book of Esther relate to the period when considerable numbers of Jews were scattered over the Persian Empire, even though many of them had returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbavel with the assent of Cyrus in the year 538 before the common era.

## ESTHER

### I

It happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia, over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces. In those days, when king Ahasuerus occupied his royal throne in Shushan the capital, during the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his officers and servants. The nobles of the Persian-Median army and the governors of the provinces were present, when he displayed the wealth of his royal splendor and his glorious greatness for many days, a hundred and eighty days in all.

When these days were over, the king gave a banquet for all the people present in Shushan the capital, high and low, a banquet lasting for seven days, in the court of the garden of the royal palace. There were hangings of white, violet and blue cotton, corded with fine purple linen, caught up on silver rings and marble columns; the couches of gold and silver were set on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and costly stones. The drinks were served in golden cups of various patterns; the royal

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One of the most cherished books in Jewish literature, Esther tells the story of a girl by the name of Hadassah who used her influence as queen of Persia to save her people from a general massacre which Haman had plotted against them on purely racial grounds. It is a tale of plot and counterplot, showing

מכללים שונים וכן מלכות רב כינ' המלך: והשתחה  
כקה' אין אָנָס קִירְכָן וַיַּפְרֵד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כָּלִילָב בֵּיתו  
לעשות ברצון אישׁוֹאишׁ: גם נשתי המלכה עשה  
משתה נשים בית המלכות אשר למלך אחשوروשׁ: ביום  
השביעי כתוב לבן-המלך בין אמר ל' מהוּן בְּנֵיהֶا  
חרבונא בְּנֵיהֶا וְאַבְנֵיהֶا וְתַר וְכַרְבֵּס שְׁבָעַת הַסְּרִיסִים  
המשרתים אֲתִיְפָנִי דַמְלָךְ בְּכָתְרָמְלָכָות לְרֹאֹת הַעֲמִים  
ונשתי המלכה לבני המלך בְּכָתְרָמְלָכָות לְרֹאֹת הַעֲמִים  
והשדרם אֲתִיְפָנִי כִּירְטּוֹת מְרָאָה קְיָא: וְתַמְאַן הַמְלֵפה  
ונשתי לבוא בְּרַבְרָה המלך אשר בֵּינְךָ הַסְּרִיסִים וְיַקְצֵף  
המלך מְאַר וְחַמְתוֹ בְּעֵרָה בּוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר המלך  
לחכמים זְדַעַת הַעֲמִים קִירְכָן דָבֵר המלך לפני זְדַעַת  
הַתְּוֹדוֹן: וְדַקְרֵב אַלְיוֹ פְּרַשְׁנָא שְׁתַר אַרְמָתָא תְּרִשְׁישׁ  
מְרָסְמָנוּ מִמּוֹכוֹן שְׁבָעַת שְׁרִי פְּלָס וּמְרִי רָאֵי פָנִי  
המלך הַיְשָׁבִים רְאַשְׁנָה בְּמַלְכָות: כְּרוֹת מְהַלְלָשׁוֹת  
בְּמַלְכָה וְשַׁתִּי עַל אֲשֶׁר לְאַעֲשָׂתָה אֲתִיְמָאָרֵל דַמְלָךְ  
אַחֲשָׁרוֹשׁ בֵּין הַסְּרִיסִים: נִיאָמֶר מָמְקָן לְפָנֵי המלך  
והשדרם לא על-המלך לבדו עוותה ונשתי המלכה כי  
על-כל-השדרם ועל-כל-העם אשר בכל-מִדְינּוֹת  
המלך אחשوروשׁ: קִרְצֵא רַבְרַמְלֵפה על-כל-השדרם  
להבות בעלהן בעיניהם באמרם המלך אחשوروשׁ אמר  
להביה אֲתִיְשְׁתִּי דַמְלֵכה לְפָנֵי וְלְאַבָּאהֶה: והיום הַזֶּה

קרוי פָּנוֹן.

the downfall of the arrogant and the vindication of the innocent. Haman's fate reminds us that pride goes before a fall. Ahasuerus, who agrees to Haman's plot without thought, is portrayed as a pompous and feeble-minded monarch. He is identified by some Bible scholars with Xerxes, who reigned from 486

wine was in plenty according to the bounty of the king. The drinking was regulated, so that there was no one compelling to drink, for the king had given orders to all the stewards of his palace to respect the wishes of each man. Queen Vashti, too, held a banquet for the women in the royal palace of king Ahasuerus.

On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Biztha, Harvona, Bigtha, Avagtha, Zethar and Karkas, the seven eunuchs who attended King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before him wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and the officers, for she was indeed a beautiful woman. But Queen Vashti refused to come in answer to the king's order, brought by the eunuchs. The king was thereupon greatly incensed, his anger blazed up.

Then the king consulted the wise men versed in precedents, for it was the royal way of discussing any action with those who were expert in law and justice. Closest to him were Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memukhan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king and held first place in the empire. He asked: "What ought to be done to Queen Vashti for refusing to obey the command of King Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?"

Memukhan replied in presence of the king and the princes: "Queen Vashti has done wrong not to the king alone, but also to all the officers and to all the peoples in all the lands of King Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen will be made known to all the women, causing them to look down upon their husbands, saying: King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come. This very day, the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will be telling

to 465 B.C.E. Others believe him to be Artaxerxes II, who reigned from 404 to 361, and who is mentioned in Ezra 4:6.

Though the name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, the author clearly implies that God used Mordecai and Esther as instruments for the deliverance of a persecuted people. Piety in its usual sense receives little emphasis in this book. God is not mentioned even when the sense demands, as when Mordecai suggests that deliverance may arise from another quarter (4:14). Prayer does not accompany fasting during Esther's preparation for pleading with the king.

האמרינה ושירות פְּרָסִיזֶמֶר אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעַו אֶת־דָּבָר הַמֶּלֶךְ  
לְכָל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּכְרִי בּוֹזָן וּכְצָרִי: אַסְ-עַלְ-הַמֶּלֶךְ טֹוב  
צִא רַבְּ-מְלָכָות מִלְּפָנָיו וּבְתַבְּרָתִי פְּרָסִיזֶמֶר וְלֹא  
יעֲבֹר אֲשֶׁר לְאֶתְבָּא וְשָׁתֵּי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֹרֹשׁ  
וּמְלָכִיתָה יְתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ לְרוּתָה הַטוּבָה מִפְּנָה: וְנִשְׁמַעַן  
פְּתַנְסָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־יִעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל־מְלָכָותָנוּ בַּיּוֹם הַיּוֹם  
וְכָל־דָּגְשִׁים יְתַנוּ יָקָר לְכַעַלְתֵּן לְמַגְדָּול וְעַדְקָתֵן: וַיַּטְבֵּל  
הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשְׁרִים וַיַּעֲשֶׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּדָבָר קָמִיקָן:  
וַיְשַׁלַּח סְפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינּוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה  
בְּכְתָבָה וְאֶל־עַם וְעַם בְּלָשׁוֹן לְלֹזֶת כָּל־אִישׁ שָׁעֵר  
בְּכִיתּוֹ וּמְרַבֵּר בְּלָשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ:

## ב

אַחֲרֵ הַדָּבָרִים דָּאַלְהָ בְּשַׁךְ חַמְתַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֹרֹשׁ וְכֵר  
אֶת־דְּשָׁתִי וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂתָה וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־נִנְעַר עָלֶיהָ:  
וַיֹּאמְרוּ נְעַרְתִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו וְבָקָשׁוּ לְמֶלֶךְ נְעַרְתִּי בְּרִילּוֹת  
טוּבָות מִרְאָה: וַיַּפְלֵךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקוּדִים בְּכָל־מְדִינּוֹת  
מְלָכָות וַיַּקְבְּצָו אֶת־כָּל־נְעַרְתִּי בְּחִילָה טוֹבָת מִרְאָה אֶל־  
שָׁוֹשָׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל־בִּבְתָּרָה אֶל־בְּבִתְּרָה אֶל־בְּבִתְּרָה  
שָׁמֶר הַגְּשִׁים וַיִּתְנוּן פְּמָרְקָהָנוּ: וַיַּגְעַרְתָּה אֲשֶׁר תִּטְבַּל  
בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלָךְ תְּחִת וְשָׁתֵּי וַיִּטְבֵּל הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי  
הַמֶּלֶךְ נְעַשֵּׂה בָּנָן: אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הַהָּרָא בְּשָׁוֹשָׁן הַבִּירָה  
וְשָׁמוֹ מְרַדְכִּי בּוֹן־אִיר בְּרַשְׁמָעִי בְּדַקְשָׁ אִישׁ יְמִינָן: אֲשֶׁר  
הַגָּלָה מִירוּשָׁלָם עַמְּדָגָלָה אֲשֶׁר הַגָּלָה עִם יְכִינָה

The book of Esther has become a symbol of heroic resistance against persecution followed by deliverance. The downfall of Haman, brought about by his futile attempt to exterminate the Jewish people, is a triumphant re-

it to all the officers of the king, and there will be plenty of disrespect and wrath. If it please the king, let a royal edict go forth from him and let it be inscribed in the laws of the Persians and Medes, never to be revoked, that Vashti shall not again appear before King Ahasuerus, and let the king assign her royal position to another who is better than she. So, when the king's decree is proclaimed throughout his realm, vast as it is, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low."

This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memukhan proposed. He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, directing that every man should be master in his own house and speak the language of his own people.

## II

After these events, when the anger of King Ahasuerus calmed down, he recalled what Vashti had done and what had been decreed against her. So the king's attendants said: "Let beautiful girls be sought out for the king; let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his realm to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the women's quarters in Shushan the capital city, to be placed under the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the women; let them be provided with the cosmetics they require. Let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This idea pleased the king and he acted on it.

Now there was a Jew in Shushan the capital city whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been carried off from Jerusalem along with the exiles who had been deported with Jekhoniah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar

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minder of the continuing life of the Jewish people in the face of all persecution. It has been suggested that the omission of reference to God in the book of Esther is easily understood in a story designed to be recited at a festival of conviviality, merrymaking, and noise, such as Purim. The noise-making instruments, used to blot out the name of Haman, are reminiscent of Deut-

מלך ירושה אשר הגלה נבורנץ מלך בבל: ויהי אמן אתדרפה דיא אסתר בתידיו כי אין לה אב ואמ והעירה יפתחהר וטيبة מראה ובמות אביה ואמה ליה מרדכי לו לבת: ויהי בהשמע דברה מלך דרכו ובכחבץ נערות רבות אלשוון ובירה אליך גני ותליך אסתר אלכית המלך אליך הע שמר נשים: ותליך הנעה בעינו ותשא חסיד לפניו ייבהל ארתי פמרוקה ואתמנותה לחת לה ואת שעב הערות הראות לחתילה מבית המלך יישנה ואתינערותה לטוב בית הנשים: לאהנידה אסתר אתעטה ואת מולדת כי מרדכי צוה עליה אשר לאתניד: ובכל יום ויום מרדכי מתקלך לפני חצר בית הנשים לדיעת אתישלים אסתר ומהיעשה בה: ובגען תר נערה גערה לבוא אלמלך אחשורוש מקץ היה לה ברת הנשים שנים עשר חדש כי בן ימלאו ימי מרכזן ששה חדשים בשמן ובמר וששה חדשים בבשימים ובתמרוקן הנשים: ובזה הנעה באה אלמלך את בלאשר האמר יתן לה לבוא עמה מבית הנשים עדבית המלך: בערב ורא באה ובכבר היא שבת אלכית הנשים שני אליך שעשינו סרים המלך שמר הפליגים לאח בבוועוד אלמלך כי אסיחפין בה המלך ונקראה בשם: ובגען קרא אסתר בתאכתייל לד מרדכי אשר

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conomy 25:19 concerning the merciless Amalekites: "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." Some were accustomed to have Haman's name written on the soles of their shoes, so that it was worn away through stamping their feet whenever it was mentioned during the reading of *Megillath Esther*.

king of Babylon had carried away. He had a foster-child Hadassa, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The girl was beautiful and lovely, and when her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.

When the king's bidding and edict were proclaimed, and when many girls were being brought to the capital of Shushan and placed in charge of Hegai, Esther was taken into the royal house to be entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the women. The girl pleased him; she became a favorite of his; he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her allowance of food, and also with seven picked maids from the king's palace; he gave her and her maids privileges in the women's quarters.

Esther had not said anything about her people or her descent, for Mordecai had told her to say nothing about it. Every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the women's quarters to learn how Esther was fairing and what was happening to her.

Now, when the turn came for every girl to go to King Ahasuerus, after she had spent twelve months' treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. In the evening she went, and in the morning she came back to the second harem in charge of Shashgaz, the king's eunuch, who had charge of the concubines. She did not go in to the king again, unless the king desired her and she was summoned by name.

When the turn came for Esther, daughter of Avihail the uncle

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In many regards the story of Esther is typical of the Jewish experience in the Diaspora. By the association of its events with the fate of the Jewish people, the narrative has invited amplifications readily supplied by popular fancy. According to Pirké d'Rabbi Eliezer of the eighth century, Mordecai was named *Yehudi* (Jew) because he was engaged in Torah study all his life, and was not defiled by any forbidden food. He heard the two eunuchs of the

למהלו לbuat לבוא אלת-פָּלֵד לא בקשה הַבָּבָר אֶת  
 אַדְּ-אַשְׁר יאמָר הַגַּע סִירִס-דְּ-אַלְדָּשָׁר הַגָּשִׁים הַתְּהִרְתִּי  
 אַסְתָּר נְשָׂאת תְּנִזְעִין בְּלֹא-הַלְּקָה אַסְתָּר אַבָּא  
 הַמְּלָד אַהֲשָׂר-הַשְׁׁאַלְתָּן בְּרִדְשָׁה הַעֲשָׂרִי דָּיאָ  
 תְּלִשְׁת מְגַת בְּשַׁנְתָּה-שְׁבָעָה לְפִנְיוֹ מְבָלְבָה הַלְּוָתָה  
 אַסְתָּר מְכַלְּדָשָׁיְתָה הַשְׁׁאַלְתָּן וְהַסְּפָר לְפִנְיוֹ מְבָלְבָה הַלְּוָתָה  
 וַיָּשָׁם כְּהַרְמָלְבָה בְּרָאַשָּׁה וְמְלִבָּה תְּהִרְתִּי וְשְׁקָרִי: וְעַבְרִי אָתָּה  
 הַמְּלָד מְשֻׁעָה בְּרָאַשָּׁה וְרוֹלָל לְפִנְיוֹ וְעַבְרִי אָתָּה מְשֻׁעָה  
 אַסְתָּר בְּגַהְגָה לְמִרְעִוָּה עַשְׂרָה וְתְּעִן מְשָׁאָה בְּרִדְשָׁה:  
 וּבְהַגְּזָן בְּתִלְוֹת שְׁעִיר וּמְרָדְכִּי יְשָׁב בְּעַרְתָּמָלָה:  
 אֵין אַסְתָּר מְגַדָּה מְלִהְרָה וְתְּעִירָה אַתְּ-עִירָה בְּאַשְׁׁר צָוָה  
 מְגַדָּה וְאַדְמָאָר מְרָדְכִּי אַסְתָּר עַשְׂרָה בְּנִתָּה  
 אַסְתָּר אָתָּה: בְּיִמְעָם הַתְּמִימָה כְּתָבָתָה  
 גַּמְלָד בְּאָחָר בְּנָהָר הַהְרָשָׁנָה-גַּמְלָד כְּמַשְׁבָּר-בְּמַסְּפָּה  
 וְגַמְשָׁשׁוֹ לְשָׁלָל דָּק בְּעַלְלָה אַבְשָׁוָשָׁה: וְגַמְעָה  
 לְמַרְכָּבָה וְעַלְלָה לְאַסְתָּר הַמְּלָגָה הַתְּאָמָר אַסְתָּר לְמַלְלָה  
 בְּשָׁם מְגַדָּה: וְגַמְשָׁש הַדְּבָר וְגַמְזָא וְתְּלָל שְׁגָדָם עַל  
 עַל עַקְבָּב קְסָפָר גְּבָרִי הַתְּמִימָה לְפִנְיוֹ הַמְּלָד:

אַדְרָבָד הַבְּרִים דָּאַלָּה גַּדְלָה אַדְדָאָל  
 בְּדַהְמְרָבָה הַאֲגָי יְעַשְׂאָה וְשָׁם אַרְבָּסָא וְעַל  
 דְּשָׁרִים אֲשֶׁר אָתָּה: וְכַל-עַבְרָד הַמְּלָד אַשְׁר-בְּשָׁעָר דְּמַלְלָה  
 וְמְשִׁקְבָּה וְמְשִׁקְבָּה לְדָמָן בְּרִיכָה בְּתַלְלָה וְמְשִׁקְבָּה

king, saying: "The king will now take the afternoon nap, after which he will ask for a drink of water. Let a deadly poison be given to him in the golden vessel, and he will drink thereof and die." Now, Esther told the king in the

of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his daughter, to go to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch advised, being in charge of the women. Esther was liked by all who saw her. When Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal house, in the seventh year of his reign, in the tenth month, that is the month of Teveth, the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the girls; he placed the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. The king then gave a great banquet to all his officers and courtiers, a banquet in honor of Esther. He granted remission of taxes to the provinces and distributed gifts worthy of a king.

During a second levy of girls, Mordecai sat at the king's gate. Now Esther had not yet said anything about her descent or her people, on the instructions of Mordecai; she still did what Mordecai told her, just as when she was his ward. It was in those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, that Bigthan and Teresh, two of the royal eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. The plot became known to Mordecai, who disclosed it to Queen Esther. Esther told the king, in Mordecai's name. When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. The story was recorded in the annals in the presence of the king.

### III

It was after this that King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, setting his seat above all the princes who were with him. All the royal courtiers within the king's gate bowed low and prostrated themselves before Haman, for the king had so ordered concerning him. But

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name of Mordecai. Hence, the sages have said: Whoever tells something in the name of its original author brings redemption into the world . . . Haman was an astrologer; he cast lots by the constellations to know the distinction between one day and another . . . (chapters 49-50).

לא יברע ולא ישתחוו: ניאמרו עברי המלך אשר בשער המלך לזרדי מדוע אתה עובר את מצות המלך: ויהיו באמרים אלו יום ולא שמע אליהם נגידו להם לראות העמוץ דברי מרדכי בידיגר ללב אשרתוא דודי: נראה דמן קידאין מרדכי ברע ומשתתעה לו נימלא דמן חמה: נבו בעיניו לשלחך דב במרדי לכהו בידיגר לו אתים מרדכי נבקש דמן לדושמיך אתבלדיותים אשר בכל מלכות אחשורי שעם מרדכי: בחדש הראשון הויא חדש ניסן בשעת שתים עשרה למולך אחשורי השפיל פול הוא גנורל לפניו דמן מיום ליום ומחדש לחידש שנים עשר הויא חדש אדר: ניאמר דמן למולך אחשורי ישנו עס-אחד מפער ומספר בין העמים בכל מדינות מלכיתך ותיתם שנות מקלעם ואתידתי המלך אין עשים ולמלך אין שעה להעיכם: אם עלי-המלך טוב יכתב לאברם ויעשרה אלפים בבר-סף אשקל עלי-ידי עשי המלך לאבה להביא אל-גנני המלך: ויסר דמלך אה-טבעתו מעל ידו ויתנה למון ברהמרא האגני צער היהודים: ניאמר המלך למון רב-סף נתן לך והם לעשות בו בטוב בעיניך: ויקראו ספרי המלך בחידש הראשון בשלשה עשר יום בו יכתב בכל-אשר-ציה דמן אל אחשורי-פניד מלך ואל-הפטחות אשר על-מדינה ומדינה

קיד: באפרם.

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Originally named Hadassah (myrtle), the chief character who has given her name to the book of Esther derived her adopted title from the Persian *stara* (star), according to some Bible authorities. The story of Esther is, in many regards, typical of the story of the Jewish people. It is recalled even

Mordecai did not bow low, he did not prostrate himself. So the royal courtiers who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai: "Why are you disobeying the king's order?" Day after day they said this to him, but he would not listen to them. So they informed Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew. When Haman noticed that Mordecai did not bow low to him and did not prostrate himself, he was enraged. He thought it beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai alone. They had told him who Mordecai's people were, and so Haman planned to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the entire empire of Ahasuerus.

In the first month, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast lots, called *Pur*, in the presence of Haman, for day after day and month after month, [till it fell upon the thirteenth day of] the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus: "There is a certain people, dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your realm; their laws are different from those of every other people; they do not obey the king's laws; therefore it does not befit the king to tolerate them. If it please the king, let an edict be written for their destruction; and I will pay ten thousands of silver talents into the hands of those in charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the royal treasury." So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. Then the king said to Haman: "Keep your money, and do with the people what like."

On the thirteenth day of the first month the king's secretaries were summoned, and a despatch was drawn up, in accordance with Haman's instructions, for the royal satraps, for the governors of every province, and for the officials of each separate people,

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more vividly by their daily experience than by the annual reading of the *Megillah*. The story of Esther's life is elaborated by various midrashim, in the following terms:

A foundling or an orphan, her father dying before her birth, her mother at her birth, Esther was reared in the house of Mordecai, her cousin. Her original name, Hadassah, was changed to Esther by the star-worshipers, as

ואל-שרי עם ועם מדינה ומדינה בכתבה ועם ועם  
בלשונו בשם המלך אחשירש נכתב וונחתם בטבעת  
המלך; וונשלה ספירים בנד הרצים אל-כל-מדיניות  
המלך להשמד להרג ואבר את-כל-יהודים מ너ע  
וירגון טף ונשים בנים אחד בשלשה עשר לחדר  
שנים-עשר הו-הדרש אדר ושלכים לבוז: פחצנן הכתב  
להנחות דת בכל-מדינה ומדינה גלויה לכל-העמים להיות  
עתירם ליום הזה: הרצים יצאו רוחפים בדרכו המלך  
הנחת נתנה בשושן הבירה והמלך והמן ישבו לשאות  
והעיר שישן נבוכה:

## ד

ומרדיי ידע את-כל-אשר נעשה וירבע מרדכי אתי-  
בנדיי וילבש שק ואפר ויצא בתוכה העיר נזעך עקה  
נדוליה ומדיה: ויבוא עד לפני שער-המלך כי אין לבוא  
אל-שער המלך בלבוש שק: ובכל-מדינה ומדינה מוקם  
אשר דבר-המלך ורחתו פגעה אבל גודל ליהודים וצום  
ובכי ומספר שק ואפר יציע לרבים: נתבואה נערות  
אסתר וסריסיה נגידו לה ותתחל תל המלכה מאי  
ותשלח בנים להלביש את-מרדיי ולהסיר שקו מעלו  
ולא קבל: ותקרא אסתר להתק מופיע המלך אשר  
העמיד לפני ותצורך על-מרדיי לצעת מהזיה וצל-  
מדזה: ויצא בתוך אל-מרדיי אל-הទוב העיר אשר

שרי: ותבאה

reflecting her sweet character and personal beauty. When the edict of the king was announced, and his eunuchs scoured the country in search of a new wife for the monarch, Esther hid herself and remained in seclusion for four

written for every province in its own script and for every nation in its own language; it was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet. Letters were sent by means of couriers to all the king's provinces with orders to destroy, slay, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their property. A copy of the writ was to be issued as a decree in every province, and published to all the peoples, so that they might be ready for that day. The couriers rode out in haste by order of the king, and the edict was issued in Shushan the capital city. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was thrown into confusion.

## IV

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he rent his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city crying loudly and bitterly. He came within the front of the king's gate, for inside the king's gate none in sackcloth was allowed to pass. Throughout all the provinces, wherever the king's command and edict arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, most of them lying in sack-cloth and ashes. When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about it, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them.

Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what the trouble was and what was the meaning of it all. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city-square in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened

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years, until a divine voice urged her to make her appearance among the candidates for the queen's vacant place.

The keeper of the harem showered attention upon her, and placed at her disposal riches never given to others. But she was not tempted to use the

לפנֵי שׁער־המֶלֶךְ: וַיַּגְדְּלֻ מְרַדְכִּי אֶת כָּל־אָשֶׁר קָרָה  
וְאֶת כְּפָרַשְׁת הַכְּסָף אֲשֶׁר אָמַר הַמֶּן לְשִׁקְוֹל עַל־גִּנְעֹן  
כִּפְלֶךְ בִּירוּיִם לְאָבָרִים: וְאֶת־פְּתַשְׁנִין בְּתַכְּבָדָת אֲשֶׁר  
גַּתְּנוּ בְשׁוּשָׁן לְהַשְׁמִידָם נִמְתָּן לוֹ לְהַרְאֹת אֶת־אָסְתָּר וְלְהַגְּדָה  
לְהָ וְלְצִוּוֹת עַל־הָ לְבָטָא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַתְהַנוּלְוּ וְלְבַקְשָׁ  
מְלֵפְנֵיו עַל־עַמָּה: נִבְוא בַּתְּךָ נִגְדָּר לְאָסְתָּר אֶת דִּבְרֵי  
מְרַדְכִּי: וְתַאֲמֵר אָסְתָּר לְבַתְּךָ וְתַאֲזִדוּ אֶל־מְרַדְכִּי: כִּלְ  
עַבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְעַם מְדִינּוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ יָדִיעִים אֲשֶׁר כָּל־אִישׁ  
וְאֶשְׁר־רַבְּוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַחַצֵּר הַפְּנִימִית אֲשֶׁר  
לְאִיּוֹרָא אַחֲת דְּתַו לְהַמִּת לְבָד מֵאָשֶׁר יִשְׁיטְלָו הַמֶּלֶךְ  
אֶת־שְׁרָבִית הַזָּקָב הַחַי וְאַנְיָה לֹא נִקְרָאָת לְבָוָא אֶל־  
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשְׁלִישִׁים יוֹם: נִיעַדו לְמַרְדָּכִי אֶת דִּבְרֵי אָסְתָּר:  
וַיַּאֲמֵר מְרַדְכִּי לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל־אָסְתָּר אֶל־הַדְּמֵי בְּנִפְשָׁךְ  
לְהַמְלֵט בִּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיּוֹדִים: כִּי אִסְׁתְּחַרְשָׁ  
פְּחִרִישׁ בְּעֵת הַזֹּאת רִיחֵךְ וְהַצְלָה יִעַמֵּד לְיִהּוֹדִים מִמְּקוֹם  
אַחֲרֵךְ וְבַית־אָבֵךְ תָּאַבְּרוּ וְמַיִּוְצָע אִסְּלָעָת בְּזֹאת  
הַעֲתָה לְמַלְכָּתְךָ: וְתַאֲמֵר אָסְתָּר לְהַשִּׁיב אֶל־מְרַדְכִּי:  
לְכָל־בְּנוֹם אֶת־כָּל־יִהּוֹדִים הַנִּמְצָאים בְּשׁוֹשָׁן וְצַוְמוֹ עַל־  
וְאַל־חַאֲבָלָו וְאַל־חַשְׁׁטוֹ שֶׁלְשָׁת יָמִים לִילָּה יוֹם נִסְׁעָן  
וּנְפָרָחָן אֲצָוָם בָּנו וּבָנָן אֲבָוָא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לְאַכְלָת  
וּבְאָשֶׁר אַכְלָתִי אֲכְרָתִי: וַיַּעֲלֵר מְרַדְכִּי וַיַּעֲשֵׂה כָּל־אָשֶׁר  
אָוֹתָה עַלְיוֹ אָסְתָּר:

קרני ביהודים.

king's luxuries, nor did she eat of the king's food. Together with her seven maids she continued her modest mode of living. When her turn came to be ushered into the royal presence, the decision in her favor was at once assured. The king was very desirous of learning all about Esther's family, but Esther

to him, and all about the money that Haman had offered to pay into the royal treasury for the annihilation of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the edict which had been proclaimed in Shushan for their destruction, so that he might show it to Esther and tell her about it, bidding her to go to the king to plead with him and entreat him for her people. Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Esther told Hathach to return to Mordecai with this message: "All the king's courtiers and the people of the king's provinces know that if any person, man or woman, enters the king's presence in the inner court unbidden, there is but one law for him: it is death, except for the person to whom the king extends the golden scepter, which means he shall live. I have not been summoned to come to the king in the past thirty days."

When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai had this answer sent to Esther: "Do not imagine you will escape inside the royal palace any more than the rest of the Jews. If you remain silent at such a time as this, relief and deliverance for the Jews will appear from some other quarter, but you and your father's household will perish. Who knows, perhaps it is for such a time as this that you have come to royal estate!"

Thereupon Esther had this answer sent to Mordecai: "Go and assemble all the Jews to be found in Shushan and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night and day. I and my maids will fast as you do; and so I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai went away and did exactly as Esther had ordered him.

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turned the conversation in a way to leave the king's curiosity unsatisfied.

In rabbinic legend, Esther is one of the four most beautiful women ever created. She remained eternally young. When she married Ahasuerus she was at least forty years of age.

Diverse opinions have been held on the subject of the historicity of the book of Esther. Many writers maintain the narrative to be thoroughly his-

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torical, for it refers more than once to the *chronicles* of Persia as containing a record of the events in question. The feast of Purim, with which the nar-

## V

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the royal palace, facing the king's house. The king was seated on his royal throne in the royal palace opposite the entrance to the palace. When the king noticed Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor. The king extended to Esther the golden scepter which he was holding, and Esther touched the tip of the scepter. Then the king said to her: "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Up to half the kingdom shall be given to you." Esther said: "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet which I have prepared for him." Thereupon the king commanded: "Bring Haman at once, to fulfill Esther's wish!" So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

During the wine feast the king said to Esther: "What is your petition? It shall be granted you; what is your request? Up to half my kingdom, it shall be done." But Esther replied: "My petition, my request is: If I have won the king's favor, if it please the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to a banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do the king's bidding.

That day Haman came forth glad and gratified. When, however, Haman noticed that Mordecai in the king's gate neither rose nor stirred before him, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. But Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. Haman recounted to them the glory of his wealth, the abundance of his children, and how the

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rative is so closely connected, has been observed by the Jewish people in all parts of the world. It is a standing memorial of the remarkable episode in Jewish history which the book records. Its lifelike representation of Persian manners and customs is borne out by the results of modern research. The

על־השׁרים ועבָדִ הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּן אָף לְאַדְבִּיאָה אַסְתָּר הַמֶּלֶךְ עַם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמְּשֻׁתָּה אֲשֶׁר־עֲשָׂתָה כִּי אִסְּאוֹתִי וְגַסְּלִמְתִּר אֲנִי קָרוֹא לְהָעֵדָה וְכָל־זֹה אִינְנוּ שׁוֹהֵל בְּכָל־עֵת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רָאָה אַתִּמְרָדִי תִּהְוֶה יֹשֵׁב בַּשְּׂעֵר דַּמֶּלֶךְ: וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ זָרֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר וְכָל־אֲהָבֵי יְעַשְׂרֵעַ נִבְהָה חַמְשִׁים אַמָּה וּבְקָרָק אָמֶר לַמֶּלֶךְ וַיְתַלֵּ אַתִּמְרָדִי עַלְיוֹ וְבָא עַם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמְּשֻׁתָּה שָׁמָה וַיְיַטֵּב הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּן וַיַּעֲשֵׂה הַעַז:

בְּלִילָה כִּי־הָא נִדְעָה שָׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לְהַבִּיא אֶת־סִפְרַ הַוְּכָרְנוֹת דְּכָרֵי הַיּוֹם וַיְהִי נִקְרָאִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיִּמְצָא בְּחֻוב אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה מְרָדִי עַל־בְּנֹתָנָא וְתַרְשָׁ שְׁנִי סְרִיפִי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמֵרִי הַסְּפָר אֲשֶׁר בְּקָשׁוֹ לְשַׁלֵּחַ זֶה בַּמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשּׁוֹרֹזֶשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מִהָּעֲשָׂה יָקָר וּנוֹרָה לְמְרָדִי עַלְיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר נִעְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתוֹ לְאַנְעָשָׂה עַמּוֹ דָּבָר: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַי בְּחָצֵר וְהַמֶּן בָּא לְחַצֵּר בִּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ כְּחִזּוֹנָה לְאַמְרָה לְמֶלֶךְ לְתִלְוֹת אַתִּמְרָדִי עַל־הַעַזְעָן אֲשֶׁר־הָכִין לוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר נִעְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲלֹיו רַעַנָּה הַמֶּן עַמְרָ בְּחָצֵר וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ יְבָא: יְבָא הַמֶּן וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִרְדִּילְעָשׂות בְּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בְּקָרְיוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּן בְּלֹבֶן לְמַי יְחָפֵץ הַמֶּלֶךְ לְעָשׂות יָקָר יוֹתֶר מִמְּנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּן אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בְּקָרְיוֹ: יְבָא לְכֹושׁ מֶלֶכְותָה אֲשֶׁר לְבָשָׁבוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ

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conduct of Ahasuerus is in harmony with the vain, capricious, passionate character of Xerxes. The silence of contemporary and later writings regarding

king promoted him, advancing him above the officers and royal courtiers. Then Haman said: "Queen Esther invited no one but myself to accompany the king to the banquet which she had prepared. I am invited again to come along with the king tomorrow. But all this means little to me so long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." Thereupon his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him: "Let gallows be made, fifty cubits high; speak to the king tomorrow morning, and let Mordecai be hanged on it. Then go with the king to the banquet in good spirits." This pleased Haman, and he had the gallows set up.

## VI

That night, sleep left the king, so he ordered the book of annals to be brought and read aloud to him; in it was found written that Mordecai had given information about Bigthana and Teresh, the two royal eunuchs of the threshhold guards, who had plotted to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. The king thereupon asked: "What honor or dignity has been conferred on Mordecai for this?" The king's courtiers attending him replied: "Nothing at all has been done for him." Then said the king: "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had entered the outer court to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had set up. The king's pages answered him: "There is Haman, standing in the court!" "Let him enter," said the king. Haman came in, and the king said to him: "What should be done to the man whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman said to himself: "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me? So Haman said to the king: "As for the man whom the king delights to honor, let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and a horse on which the

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the events narrated in the book of Esther is partly due to the disappearance of literature bearing on the history of Persia.

On the other hand, there are Bible scholars who object to the historicity of the book, because the story bears the appearance of a historical romance.

וְסָם אֲשֶׁר רַכֵּב עַלְיוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֲשֶׁר נָטוּ בְּתַרְמָכּוֹת בְּרַאשׁוֹ: וַיְתַחַן הַלְּבֹשׁ וְהַסּוּס עַל־דָּאִישׁ טְשֵׁרִי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּרַתְמִים וְהַלְּבָשׁוֹ אַתְּדָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הַמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בַּקְּגָדוֹ וְרַבְּיָבָחוֹ עַל־הַסּוּס בְּרַחְוֹב הַעִיר וְקָרָאוּ לִפְנֵיו בְּכָה יְעַשֵּׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כַּמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בַּקְּגָדוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַמְּנִין מִבָּרְקָה אֲתָּה לְבֹשׁ וְאַתְּדָסֹט כַּאֲשֶׁר דָּבָרָת וְעַשְׂה־כָּן לְמִרְדָּכַי הַיְהוּדִי הַיֹּשֵׁב בַּשְׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־תְּפִלֵּךְ דָּבָר מִפְּלָל אֲשֶׁר דָּבָרָת: וַיַּקְרֵחַ הַמְּנִין אֲתָּה לְבֹשׁ וְאַתְּדָסֹט וַיַּלְבִּשׁ אֲתָּה מִרְדָּכַי וַיַּרְכִּיבָּהוֹ בְּרַחְוֹב הַעִיר וַיִּקְרֵא לִפְנֵיו בָּכָה יְעַשֵּׂה לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כַּמֶּלֶךְ חָפֵץ בַּקְּגָדוֹ: וַיַּשְׁבֵּט מִרְדָּכַי אֶל־שְׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמְּנִין נִרְקַע אֶל־בִּירוֹא אֶכְלָה וְחַפְּיִ רָאשׁ: וַיַּסְפֵּר הַמְּנִין לַוְרֶשׁ אַשְׁתוֹ וְלַכְלָא־אַחֲרָיו אֶת בְּלָא־אֲשֶׁר קָרָדוּ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ בְּכָמְיוֹ וּוּרְשׁ אַשְׁתוֹ אַם מִגְּרָע הַיְהוּדִים מִרְדָּכַי אֲשֶׁר הַחֲלוֹת לְנִפְלֵל לִפְנֵיו לֹא תָּכֹל לוֹ כַּיְנָפֹל תִּפְלֹל לִפְנֵיו: עֲזָרָם מִרְבָּרִים עַמּוֹ וּסְרִיפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַגְּנִיעוֹ וַיַּכְלְלוּ לְהַבְּיאָ אַתְּדָמְן אֶל־הַמְּשִׁחָה אֲשֶׁר־עִשְׂתָה אָסְטָר:

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וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמְּנִין לְשִׁתּוֹת עַמְּ-אָסְטָר הַמֶּלֶכהָ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאָסְטָר גַּם בַּיּוֹם הַשְׁנִי בְּמִשְׁתָה הַיּוֹן מִהְשָׁאַלְתָּךְ אָסְטָר הַמֶּלֶכהָ וְתַגְּמִן לְךָ וּמְהַבְּקַשְׁתָּךְ עַד־חַצֵּי הַמֶּלֶכהָ וְתַעֲשֵׂ: וַתִּעֲנִן אָסְטָר הַמֶּלֶכהָ וַתֹּאמֶר אֶם־מִצְאָתִי חַן

They regard a number of its features as extremely improbable; for example, the six months' feast, involving prolonged absence of the governors from their duties in the provinces; the decree for the wholesale massacre of the Jews on account of a single Jew; the issue of a subsequent decree virtually sanctioning

king has ridden, with a royal crown upon its head. Let robe and horse be entrusted to one the king's noble officers, and let him attire the man whom the king delights to honor and lead him mounted on the horse through the city square, proclaiming in front of him: "This is what is done to the man whom the king delights to honor!" Then the king said to Haman: "Get the robe and the horse at once, as you have said, and do all this for Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Omit nothing of all that you have said." So Haman took the robe and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square, proclaiming before him: "This is what is done for the man whom the king delights to honor!"

Mordecai went back to the king's gate, but Haman hurried home lamenting, with his head veiled. And when Haman recounted to his wife Zeresh and to all his friends everything that had befallen him, his advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not get the better of him; you will ever fail and fall before him."

While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

## VII

So the king and Haman came to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the banquet: "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Up to half my kingdom, it shall be done." Queen Esther replied: "If I have won your favor, O king, and if

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civil war; the immense slaughter of Persians despite their superiority in numbers.

None of these objections, however, are successful in view of the ancient observance of the feast of Purim, which forms a considerable presumption in favor of its being founded on facts.

בעינך מלך ואס-על-המלך טוב תען לי נפש  
בשאלתי ועמי בבקשתי: כי נמברנו אני ועמי להשמד  
לקרון ולאבד אולו לעברים ולשפות נמברנו החרשתי  
כי אין האר שוה בNEG קמלך: ויאמר מלך  
אחשורוש ויאמר לאסתור המלכה מי הוא וארעה  
הוא אשר מלוא ליבו לעשות בנו: ותאמר אסתור איש  
צער וויב חמן הרע הוה וחמן נבעת מלפני מלך  
ומלך: ומלך קם בחתתו ממשתה בינו אל-ענק  
הביתן ורמן עמד לבקש עלי-נפשו מאסתור המלכה כי  
ראה בירכלה אלוי הרעה מעת מלך: ומלך שב  
מנת הביתן אל-בית משתה הין ורמן נפל על-המפה  
אשר אסתור עלה ויאמר מלך הנם לבוש ארי  
המלך עמי בבית הרבר יצא מפי המלך ופני רמן חפו:  
ויאמר חרבונה אחד ממידרטיים לפניו המלך נס העדר  
הען אשר עשה חמן למדרכי אשר דבר-טוב על-המלך  
עמד בבית רמן נבנה חמשים אמה ויאמר מלך תלו  
עלן: ויהלו את-המן על-הען אשר-הכנן למדרכי וחתמת  
מלך שכבה:

## ח

ביום ההוא נתן מלך אחשורוש לאסתור המלכה את-  
בית רמן צער היהודים ומדרכיו בא לפניו מלך כי  
הנידה אסתור מה רואלה: וספר המלך את-טבעתו

קרוי פָּיוֹרִים.

Ginzberg, in *The Legends of the Jews* (VI,481), cites sources on the regulations concerning the writing of the *Megillah*. It must be written in lines as though it were the Torah itself (*Megillah* 16b). The name of God is not found in the book of Esther because of the fact that God did not care to testify to

it please the king, let my life be granted me as my wish, and let my people be spared as my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, slain, and exterminated. If we had been merely sold as men and female slaves, I would have kept silent. The adversary indeed is not worthy of the damage to the king.

Thereupon King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther: "Who is it? Where is the one who dared to do such a thing?" "It is a foe, an enemy," said Esther, "this wicked Haman!" Haman trembled in terror before the king and the queen. The king rose from the wine-feast in a rage and went into the palace garden, while Haman stayed to plead with Queen Esther for his life; for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banqueting house, there was Haman prostrate on the couch where Esther reclined! The king exclaimed: "Will he actually ravish the queen in my own house?" No sooner had the words left the king's mouth than Haman's face was covered with despair. One of the royal eunuchs, Harvonah, said: "Furthermore, at Haman's house the gallows is standing, fifty cubit high, which Haman has prepared for Mordecai, who has done good service to the king." "Hang him on it!" the king ordered. So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's rage calmed down.

## VIII

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, enemy of the Jews. Mordecai entered the king's presence, for Esther had revealed his relationship to her. The king drew off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and

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the mixed marriage between Ahasuerus and Esther. In time to come, only the Pentateuch and the book of Esther will retain their worth. Only Purim and Yom Kippur will be celebrated in time to come. Esther risked her life for her people, and as her reward a book of the Holy Scriptures bears her name.

אשר הַעֲבִיר מֵהַמָּן וַיַּעֲנֵה לְמַרְדָּכָי וַיַּשְׁמֵם אַסְטָר אֶת־  
מַרְדָּכָי עַל־בֵּית הַמָּן: וַיַּסַּף אַסְטָר וַיַּדְבֵּר לִפְנֵי  
הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּפְלֵל לִפְנֵי רַגְלָיו וַיַּבְךְ וַיַּתְחַנֵּן לוֹ לְהַעֲבִיר אֶת־  
רַעַת הַמָּן הָאָנוֹ וְאֶת מְרַחְבָּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָשַׁב עַל־יְהוּדִים:  
וַיַּשְׁטַת הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְטָר אֶת שְׁרַבְתִּי הַזָּהָב וְתַכְמִים אַסְטָר  
וַיַּעֲמֵד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר אָסְדָּעַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טֹב וְאֶם  
מֵצָאתִי חָן לִפְנֵי וּכְשֶׁר הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְטוֹבָה אָנוּ  
בְּעַיְנוּ יְבָתֵּב לְהַשִּׁיב אֶת־יְהָפְרָאִים מִמְּחַשְּׁבַת הַמָּן בְּךָ  
הַמְּרַחְתָּא הָאָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּתַבְלֵב לְאָבָר אֶת־יְהָוָהִים אֲשֶׁר  
בְּכָל־מְדִינָה הַמֶּלֶךְ: כִּי אַיְכָה אָכֵל וּרְאֵיתִ בְּרַעַת  
אֲשֶׁר־יָמַצָּא אֶת־עַמִּי וְאַיְכָה אָכֵל וּרְאֵיתִ בְּאַבְנָן  
מוֹלְדָתִי: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשּׁוֹרֵשׁ לְאַסְטָר הַמֶּלֶךְ  
וְלִמְרְדָּכָי הַיְהוּדִי הַנָּה בֵּית־הַמָּן נְתַתִּי לְאַסְטָר וְאֶת־  
תְּלַוּ עַל־הַעֲלֵין עַל אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יְהוָה בְּיְהוּדִים: נָאָתָם  
כַּתְבּוּ עַל־יְהָוָהִים כְּטוֹב בְּעִינָיכֶם בְּשָׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ וְחַתְמָיו  
בְּטֻבָּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־כַתָּב אֲשֶׁר־גַּכְתָּב בְּשָׁם־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנְהַתָּוּ  
בְּטֻבָּעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵין לְהַשִּׁיב: וַיָּקָרְאַו סְפָרִיהַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעֵת  
הַהִיא בְּחֶדֶש הַשְׁלִישִׁי הַוְאָדָרְדָשׁ סִינּוֹ בְּשְׁלוּשָׁה  
וְעֶשֶׂרִים בָּוֹ נִכְתָּב בְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר־צָוָה מַרְדָּכָי אֶל־  
יְהָוָהִים זָאֵל הַאֲחַשְׁדָרְפָנִים וְהַפְחָות וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינָה  
אֲשֶׁר־מִדְרָיו וְעַד־פּוֹשֵׁעַ שְׁבַע וְעָשָׂרִים וּמִאָה מְדִינָה  
מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה בְּכַתְבָּה וְעַם וְעַם בְּלַשְׂנָיו וְאֶל־יְהָוָהִים

It has been suggested that the names of Haman's sons are pronounced in one breath by the reader in the synagogue to indicate that they expired instantly. Their names are written in perpendicular columns to suggest that

gave it to Mordecai; and Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's house.

Once again Esther spoke before the king, falling at his feet; she wept pleading with him to avert the calamity devised by Haman the Agagite against the Jews. The king held out to Esther the golden scepter, and she rose and stood before the king, saying: "If it please the king, if I have won his favor, if the proposal seems right to your majesty, and if I am pleasing to you, let an edict be written to recall the letters which Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, wrote about the destruction of the Jews in all the king's provinces. For how can I bear to witness the calamity which threatens my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?" Thereupon King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew: "I have given Haman's house to Esther, and he has been hanged on the gallows, because he laid hands on the Jews. Now you shall write any instructions you please regarding the Jews in the name of the king, and seal the writ with the signet of the king; for an order written in the name of the king and sealed with the royal signet cannot be revoked."

So the king's secretaries were summoned on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan, and a writ was drawn up in terms of Mordecai's orders, for the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the officers of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, the hundred and twenty-seven provinces, written for every province in its own script and for every people in its

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the ten men were hung on parallel cords. The phrases **אָרוּר הַמֶּן** (cursed be Haman) and **בָּרוּךְ מְרֹדְכַּי** (blessed be Mordecai) have the same numerical value, 502. This will explain the talmudic statement (Megillah 7b), that "a man should cheer himself with wine on Purim until he cannot tell the

בכתבים וכלהיונים: וכabbrev בשם המלך אהשוש וחתם בטבעת המלך ושלחה ספרים ביד הרצים בסוסים רכבי הרכש האחשדרנים בני הרככים: אשר נתן המלך ליהודים אשר בכל-עיר-זעיר להקלה ולעמד על-נפשם להשמד להרג ולאבד את-כל-היל עם מדינה הארץ אתם טף ונשים ושללים לבוז: בימים אחד בכל-מדינות המלך אהשוש בשלושה עשר לחידש שנים-עשר הוא-חידש אדר: פתשנין הכתוב להנתן דת בכל-מדינה ומדינה גלויה לכל-העמים וולדות היהודים עתודים ליום זהה להננים מאיביהם: הרצים רכבי הרכש האחשדרנים יצאו מבהלים ורוחפים בדרך המלך ודרת נתנה בשושן הבירה: ומרדיי יצאו מלפני המלך בלבוש מלכות הכתלה וזרע ועטרת זהב גודלה ותכליך בז' וארגמן ועיר שושן צהלה ושםה: ליהודים הייתה אוירה ושםה וששן וקר: ובכל- מדינה ומדינה ובכל-עיר ועיר מקום אשר דבריד מלך ורפו מגיע שמה ושבון ליהודים משקה ויום טוב ורבים מעמי הארץ מתינרים כי-זפל פחרית-יהודים עליהם:

## קרוי היהודים-עטודים.

difference between the phrases *ברוך מרדכי* and *ארור המן*, since they seem to signify the same thing on numerical grounds. The modern Purim carnivals in Israel are called *adloyada*, a term borrowed from the talmudic passage just quoted.

According to the biblical scholar Samuel R. Driver of the nineteenth century, the sacred writer of the book of Esther is well informed on Persian manners and institutions, and commits no anachronisms. The narrative in-

own language, and for the Jews, in their script and their language. Mordecai had it written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet.

He sent the despatches by couriers mounted on fast horses from the royal stables, to the effect that the king granted permission to the Jews of every city to unite and defend themselves; if any people or province attacks them, they are permitted to destroy, slay, and annihilate its armed force along with women and children, and to plunder their possessions, in one day, in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. A copy of the writ was to be issued as a decree in every province and published to all peoples, that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers, mounted on royal steeds, went out post-haste at the king's urgent command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the capital city.

Mordecai came out from the royal presence clad in royal robes of blue and white, with a large golden crown, and with a mantle of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan shouted for joy. For the Jews, there was light and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and city, wherever the king's command an edict arrived, the Jews had joy and gladness, feasting and a festival. Many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, because fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

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cludes items that were supplied to the author by tradition. Aided by his knowledge of Persian life and customs, he combined them into a consistent picture, parts of which owe their form to the author's love of dramatic effect.

Some non-Jewish Bible critics have found fault with the temper displayed in the book of Esther, asserting that it breathes a spirit of vengeance and hatred. Since, however, the Jewish people had been brought into a position of mortal danger by the irrational malice of a foe, it was both natural and right that Mordecai and Esther should do what lay in their power to extricate them from it. The king's decree authorized them to act in self-defense against any who assailed them.

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יבשניהם עשר חדש הווא-חדש אדר בשלושה עשר ים  
בו אשר הניע דבר-המלך ורדו להעשות ביום אשר  
שברז איבי היהודים לשלוותם בדם ונחפוץ הוא אשר  
ישלטו היהודים הארץ בשניהם: נקלו היהודים  
בעריםם בכל-מדינות המלך אחשוש לשלוח יד  
במקושים הרעחים ואיש לא-עמד בפניהם כי-ענק פחחים  
על-כל-העמים: וכל-שרי המדינות והאשדרפנום  
והפחות ועשוי המלאכה אשר למלך מושאים ארץ-  
היהודים כי-ענק פחר-מרדי עלייהם: כי-ענק מרדכי  
בבית המלך ושםיו חולך בכל-המדינות כיד-איש  
מרדי חולך ונחל: ניכו היהודים בכל-איביהם מפת-  
חרב וחרבן ואבדו ויעשו בשניהם ברצונם: ובושאן  
הרבלה הרש היהודים ואבד חמש מאות איש:

ראות

פרק ט

וְאַתָּה |

. אט

וְאֶת

אפסותא:

ו

בָּזָרְתָּא

ר' י

זנָּת

1 רשות

אברהם

יְהוָה

בְּרִיתְמָוֶת

יְהוָה

אחת

10

ב' ט

וְאֶת וְעֶשֶׂרֶת

## IX

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, when the king's command and edict was to be put in force, the very day when the enemies of the Jews expected to gain the upper hand over them, the opposite occurred; the Jews gained the upper hand over their enemies. On that day the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to attack those who sought their hurt. None could hold out against them, because fear of them had fallen upon all peoples. All the officers of the provinces, the satraps and governors, and the king's officials, showed deference to the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. Mordecai became a high personage in the royal palace; his fame spread throughout all the provinces; the man Mordecai grew steadily greater. So the Jews struck at their enemies with the sword, slaying and destroying; they wreaked their will upon those who hated them.

In Shushan, the capital city, the Jews killed five hundred men and destroyed them. They killed also

Parshandatha	Aridatha
Dalphon	Parmashta
Aspatha	Arisai
Poratha	Aridai
Adalia	Vaizatha

the sons of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews but they did not touch the plunder.

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A number of apparent exaggerations, characteristic of imaginative fiction, are pointed out by some, who endeavor to disprove the historicity of the book of Esther. They regard, for example, as overstatements the 83-ft. high gallows (5:14); the 6-months' feast (1:4); a year's beauty treatment for the court maidens (2:12); the 10,000-talent gift (= some twenty million dollars) for financing the pogrom (3:9). They question: Would Haman have

בְּנֵי קָמָן בְּקִדְמָרְתָה צָרֵר הַיְהוּדִים הָרְגִוּ וּבְכֹה לֹא  
שָׁלַחַו אֶת-יִקְרָם: בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא מִסְפֵּר הַקָּרְגִּים בְּשׁוֹעָן  
הַבִּירָה לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְטָר הַמֶּלֶבֶה  
בְּשׁוֹעָן הַבִּירָה חֲרַט נִיחּוּדִים וְאָבֵר חַמְשָׁׁׁ מֵאוֹת אַישׁ  
וְאֶת עַשְׂרַת בְּנֵי-יַעֲמֹן בְּשָׁאָר מִדְיָנִים הַמֶּלֶךְ מִה עָשָׂו  
וּמְה-שָׁאַלְתָּךְ וַיַּעֲנֵן לְךָ וּמְה-בְּקָשָׂתְךָ עֹז וְתַעֲשֶׂה: וַיֹּאמֶר  
אַסְטָר אָס-עַלְדְּמֶלֶךְ טֹב יְעַתֵּן נִס-מְחֵר לַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר  
בְּשׁוֹעָן לְעַשְׂוֹת בְּרִת נָיִם וְאֶת עַשְׂרַת בְּנֵי-יַעֲמֹן תַּחֲלוּ  
עַל-הָעֵץ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַעֲשָׂות בָּן וַיַּعֲנֵן הַתְּבִשָּׁׁׁ בְּשׁוֹעָן  
וְאֶת עַשְׂרַת בְּנֵי-יַעֲמֹן תַּקְהֵלָוּ הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר  
בְּשׁוֹעָן נִס בְּיּוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לְהַרְשָׁ אָדָר נִירְבָּעַ  
בְּשׁוֹעָן שֶׁלַשׁ מֵאוֹת אַישׁ וּבְכֹה לֹא שָׁלַחַו אֶת-יִקְרָם:  
וְשָׁאָר הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְיָנִים הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהֵלָוּ וְעַמְּדָה  
עַל-נִפְשָׁם וְנוֹחַ מַאֲכִילָם וְתַרְוגַּן בְּשָׁנָאָתָם חַמְשָׁה  
וּשְׁבָעִים אַלְפָה וּבְכֹה לֹא שָׁלַחַו אֶת-יִקְרָם: בַּיּוֹם-שְׁלֹשָׁה  
עָשָׂר לְהַרְשָׁ אָדָר וְנוֹחַ בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְעַשָּׂה אָתוֹ  
יּוֹם מִשְׁתָּחָה וּשְׁמִיחָה: הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר-בְּשׁוֹעָן נִקְהֵלָוּ  
בְּשְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וּבְאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְנוֹחַ בְּחַמְשָׁה  
עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְעַשָּׂה אָתוֹ יּוֹם מִשְׁתָּחָה וּשְׁמִיחָה: עַל-בָּן הַיְהוּדִים  
הַפְּרוֹזִים רְנִישְׁבִּים בְּעִירִ הַפְּרוֹזָה עָשִׂים אֶת יּוֹם אַרְבָּעָה  
עָשָׂר לְהַרְשָׁ אָדָר שְׁמִיחָה וּמִשְׁתָּחָה וְנוֹחַ טֹב וּמִשְׁלָחָה  
מְנוֹת אַישׁ לְרָעָיו: וַיַּכְתֵּב מִרְדָּכָי אֶת-דְּבָרִים הָאָלֶה

קָרְיִי הַיְהוּדִים. וְהַיְהוּדִים. פְּרוֹזִים.

attempted the massacre of all the Jews simply because one man defied him, and would the king have permitted it? Would Haman have fixed a date for the massacre so far ahead? Such criticism shows a strange ignorance of

That day, when the number of those killed in Shushan the capital city came to the notice of the king, the king said to Queen Esther: "In Shushan, the capital city, the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the royal provinces? What is your wish now? It shall be granted you. What else is your request? It shall be fulfilled." Esther replied: "If it please the king, let the Jews in Shushan be allowed to act tomorrow also as they did today; and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." The king ordered this to be done; an edict was issued. Haman's ten sons were hanged, and the Jews in Shushan gathered on the fourteenth day of the month Adar as well and slew three hundred men in Shushan; but they did not lay hands on the plunder.

The other Jews throughout the king's provinces had also mustered to defend their lives, getting relief from their enemies and killing seventy-five thousand; but they did not touch the plunder. This was on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; they rested on the fourteenth day, and made it a day of feasting and joy. The Jews in Shushan mustered on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the month, and rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and joy. That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month Adar in joy and feasting, as a festival on which they send gifts to one another.

Mordecai recorded these events, and sent letters to all the

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human nature indeed. Massacres and wars have been sparked off many times through the injured pride of one or two individuals. Persian kings were easily swayed by their favorites.

Haman is depicted as a thoroughly superstitious man, and the day of the massacre was chosen because the casting of lots indicated that it would be a lucky day (3:7). The gallows 83 feet high would be the typically extra-

וישלח ספרים אל-בל-יהודים אשר בבל-מדינות המלך אחשוריש הקרכבים והרחוקים: לכולם עליית להיות עשים את יום ארבעה עשר לחדש אדר ואות יוסח' משעה עשר ב' בכל-שנה ושנה: בימים אשר נח' בהם היהודים מאייביהם והחדר אש"ל נרפק להם מינון לשמה ומאבל ליום טוב לעשיותיהם ימי משטה ושמרה ומשלו' מנות איש לרעהו ומלחנות לאביהם: וקבל היהודים את אש-החלו לעשיותם ואות אש-כתוב מרדכי אליהם: כי דמן בר-הדרתא האני צרל כל-היהודים חשב על-יהודים לאבדם והפל פור היא הנורל לדם ולאברהם: ובבאה לפני המלך אמר עמו הփר ישוב מהשכטו הרעה אש-ח'ש בעל-יהודים עלאהשו ותלו אותו ואת-בנוי על-העץ: על-כן קראו לימים דאלה פורים על-שם הפור על-בן על-בל-דבורי האנרת הנות ומידרא'ו על-בכה ומה הגיע אליהם: כמו וקבל היהודים עלהם ועל-זעם ועל-זעם ועל כל הנלום עליהם ולא יעבור להנות עשים את-שען רזימים דאלה בכתבם וכומם בבל-שנה ושנה: ורומים דאלה נזקים ונעשים בבל-דור ודור משפחה ומשפחה מדינה ומדינה ועיר ועיר וימי הפורים דאלה לא יעבור מטווד היהודים וקרים לא-יסוף מושעים: ותקtab אסתר המלכה בת-אביריל ומרדי לירדי את-בל-

קרי: נקבי

vagant display of a thwarted man in power. The king was made to understand that a large proportion of Jewish property would be put in the royal treasuries.

Jews in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, far and near, charging them to keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar, year by year, as the days on which the Jews obtained relief from their enemies and as the month which was changed for them from sorrow into joy, from mourning into festivity. They were to keep them as days of feasting and joy, days for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor. The Jews undertook to continue the practice that they had begun and what Mordecai prescribed for them.

For Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews and had cast *pur*, that is the lot, to crush and destroy them. But when Esther appeared before the king, he commanded by means of letters that the wicked plot devised by Haman against the Jews should recoil on his own head. So they hanged him and his sons on the gallows. On account of that, these days were named *Purim*, from the word *pur*.

Therefore, in view of all the details in this letter, and of what they had seen and experienced in that affair, the Jews confirmed and obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days without fail in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year. These days should be rememberd and observed in each generation, family, province, and city. These days of *Purim* shall never cease among the Jews; the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.

Queen Esther, the daughter of Avihail, wrote a second letter

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Various techniques are employed in the book of Esther in order to achieve the greatest vividness and power of expression. The most ingenious of these is the construction of the plot upon the ancient blood feud between Amalek and Israel, inherited by Haman the Agagite and Mordecai the Jew. The "unlucky thirteenth" turns out to be unlucky for the opponent of the Jewish people. The main literary feature, that of a woman whose beauty

תקף לךם את־אנרגיה הפהרים הַזָּאת דְּשִׁיעִית: וַיְשַׁלֵּחַ  
סָפָרִים אֶל־פְּלִגְיוֹדִים אֶל־שְׁבֻעַ וְעַשְׂרִים וּמְאַה מִרְדֵּה  
מִלְכּוֹת אֲחַשְׁרוֹשׁ דְּבָרֵי שְׁלֹום וְאֶמֶת: לְכָם אֶת־יְמֵי  
הַפְּרִים רְאֵלה בְּנוּמִידָם כַּאֲשֶׁר קָם עַלְיָהֶם מְרַדְבֵּי הַיְהוּדִי  
וְאַסְתָּר דְּמַלְכָה וּבְאַשְׁר כִּיּוֹת עַל־נִפְשָׁם וְעַל־זָרָעָם דְּבָרֵי  
הַצּוּמוֹת וְזַעֲקָתָם: וּמְאַמֶּר אַסְתָּר קָם דְּבָרֵי נִפְשָׁים  
רְאֵלה וְנִכְתַּב בְּקָפֶר:

נִשְׁמָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁר־שׁ | מִס עַל־דָּאָרֶץ וְאַיִלְיָם: וּבֶל־  
מִעֲשָׂה תִּקְפֹּו וְגִבּוֹרָתוֹ וְפִרְשָׁתָה נְדָלָת מְרַדְבֵּי אֲשֶׁר נְדָלוּ  
הַמֶּלֶךְ גְּלֹאָתָם בְּתוּבִים עַל־סְפָר דְּבָרֵי הַיּוֹםִים לְמַלְכֵי  
מְרֵי וּבְרִסָּם: בֵּין מְרַדְבֵּי יְהוּדִי מְשֻׁנָּה לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁרוֹשׁ  
וּנְדוּל לְיְהוּדִים וּרְאֵי לְרֹוב אֲחֵי לְרֹשׁ טֹב לְעַמּוֹ דְּבָר  
שְׁלֹום לְכָלְצָרָעָו:

קרין: אַמְשָׁנָרָא.

captures the heart of the enemy and thereby saves her people from destruction, is found likewise in the apocryphal book of Judith, dating either from the Persian or Hasmonean period. It was written to encourage the Jewish people in their struggle for liberty.

The principal Persian words to be found in the book of Esther are: מְרַדְבִּים (nobles, chieftains); בְּרָסֶם (fine linen); פָּתָגָם (decree); אֲחַשְׁדָּרְטָנִים (sabotages); מַתְשָׁק (a copy); רַמְכִים (mares); אֲחַשְׁרָגִים (messengers). No Persian word resembling the name *Purim* (lots) has been found by scholars. However, the form *Purim* is supported by the tradition of the feast itself.

of Purim, confirming explicitly the message of Mordecai the Jew. Letters were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahasuerus, in terms of peace and truth. These days of Purim shall be kept at their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had obligated them, and as they had obligated themselves and their descendants, for fasting and praying. Esther's command confirmed these regulations for Purim, and the record was preserved in a book.

## X

King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the mainland and on the islands of the sea. All the acts of his power and the full account of the authority to which the king promoted Mordecai, are recorded in the royal annals of Media and Persia. For Mordecai the Jew ranked second to King Ahasuerus; he was a great man among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and spoke peace on behalf of all their children.

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The book of Esther does not prescribe any religious service for Purim: it enjoins only the annual celebration of the feast on the 14th and 15th of Adar. Some writers have therefore suggested that the observance of Purim was at first merely of a convivial and social nature. The merrymaking, feasting and masquerading, characteristic of Purim, have served a much needed relief from the serious life led during the greater part of the year.

The following seven *mitzvoth* are prescribed for Purim in the special talmudic tractate named *Megillah*: 1) *Megillah* reading in the synagogue at the beginning of the Purim festival in connection with the evening service, and again during the morning service; 2) exchange of gifts; 3) distribution of charity; 4) Torah reading; 5) recital of *Al ha-Nissim* in the *Shemoneh Esreh* and in the *Grace* after meals; the festive meal of Purim (סעודת פורים); 7) restraint of all mourning or fasting.

The *Hallel*, however, is not chanted on Purim because, unlike Hanukkah, the miracle of Purim occurred outside Eretz Yisrael. The festive meal of Purim, reminiscent of Esther's banquet, is begun in the afternoon and carried on well into the night. The day succeeding the 14th of Adar is regarded as a minor holiday, called *Shushan Purim*, the day when the Jews of Shushan celebrated their triumph.

The custom of masquerading on Purim was first introduced among the Italian Jews during the fifteenth century under the influence of the Roman carnival. Rabbi Moses Isserles (רמ"א) expresses the opinion that, since the purpose of masquerade is only merrymaking, it should not be considered a transgression of the biblical law regarding dress (אורה חיים חרוץ, יב).